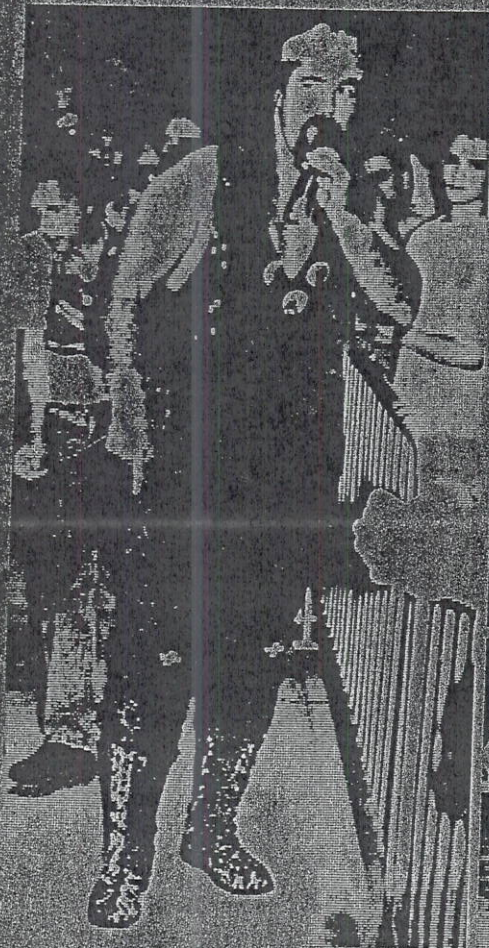


PRO WRESTLING 1991



CACTUS JACK: BRAWLER OF THE YEAR



RIC FLAIR: WRESTLER OF THE YEAR



HULK HOGAN: BABYFACE OF THE YEAR

PRO WRESTLING TORCH 1991 YEARBOOK
EDITOR/PUBLISHER: WADE D. KELLER

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FROM THE
EDITOR

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to "Pro Wrestling 1991", the Pro Wrestling Torch 1991 Yearbook. I believe this book, more than any past Torch Yearbooks, is a detailed, diverse, fair, and (most importantly) entertaining representation of the year in pro wrestling.

The book begins with the fourth annual Pro Wrestling Torch reader-voted awards. The top ten finishers in each of 29 categories are listed followed by past winners, columnist comments, reader comments, and the editor's pick.

Then comes a ten-page year-in-review including the first-ever listing of the top 50 stories of the year followed by a detailed account of the top ten. Following that are brief descriptions of the 11th through 50th stories and a detailed list of title changes in 1991.

Chris Zavisa then steps in with "Japan Journey: A 1991 Retrospective" which is a comprehensive encyclopedia of the year in Japan. For anyone who knows nothing about Japanese wrestling, reading through this article will familiarize you with the names and differences between promotions probably more than any other article. For those who follow Japanese wrestling closely, this article will bring back memories and serve as a historical record for years to come.

The newest Torch columnist, Eric Krol, believed his first assignment for the Torch should be the obituaries to pay his dues, thus he runs down the deaths in 1991 of people who were involved in pro wrestling.

Next, Bruce Mitchell and John Hitchcock bring you 40 of the most important trivia questions to be asked from 1991. You are encouraged to take the test and correct your answers. Bruce has supplied an answer key and a grading scale to see how smart of a wrestling fan you really are. Hitchcock's illustrations accompany the quiz. Please, no cheating.

In a guest feature, long time Portland Pro Wrestling follower Greg Anderson provides a retrospective on nearly 25 years of pro wrestling action promoted by one of the most respected and well-liked promoters in the business, Don Owen.

I jump in with a special feature called "The Real Story Behind the Press Meeting at Titan Towers". In August, Vince McMahon and the WWF invited various members of the wrestling press to a tour of Titan Towers and a meeting with Vince McMahon. Up to this point, not much has been written about the subject and that lack of coverage has been highly criticized by many newsletter readers and other newsletter editors. As a result, I have given in to the pressure and finally reveal the real reason nothing was written about the meeting at Titan Towers to

satisfy all who have been hungry for a juicy story.

Jeff Bowdren, formerly a Torch columnist, returns to the Torch's pages with an article analyzing Lex Luger and his decision to leave WCW a year before his contract was scheduled to expire.

Someone called the Specific Marc - not to be confused with regular Torch satirist, "Random Marc" - presents a match between The Hornet and The Black Olive. This match, in the tradition of "Grudge Match" starring Jesse Ventura, places the two men who had a grudge to settle from 1991 in the ring against each other for the first and only time.

Torch secret agent, Ken Knisely, then contributes a Torch exclusive, "The Original Plans for the SummerSlam Wedding of Miss Elizabeth and Randy Savage." No where else will you see the original plans for the wedding except in this book!

Getting back to some serious discussions, in another guest feature, Jeff Cohen addresses the issue of the disappearance of territories in pro wrestling. That is followed by Tim Whitehead who contributes a guest feature, this one on the disappearance of meaningful world title belts and world title matches in 1991.

The book concludes with a pay-per-view event - yes, a pay-per-view event at no additional cost - called "This Wednesday in Wisconsin" starring Jim Cornette, Bobby Heenan, Ric Flair, Ted Turner, and others. Torch columnist Mark Madden brings us the transcript of the pay-per-view which is available on video tape somewhere, but no one has seen it yet.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to "Pro Wrestling 1991", be it full-length articles or awards and comments. Special thanks to Martin Campbell for the title change listings and all of the Torch readers for their week-to-week support of Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly. Without your support all year long, there would be no yearbooks. And if you are not a subscriber to the weekly newsletter, please try it. Drop me a line at the address on the previous page and say you want a free sample of the 12-page newsletter. It's free, so I'll even offer a money back guarantee. Can't beat that.

Your comments and feedback on the Yearbook are welcome. Until this summer when the five-year anniversary edition of the "Pro Wrestling Torch Summer Annual" comes out and until the next Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly, take care and enjoy!

Wade Kelly

FOURTH ANNUAL TORCH YEAR-END AWARDS

1991 YEAR-END READER BALLOTING

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the wrestler who has epitomized what the ideal wrestler should be. This wrestler should be the best representative of the sport of pro wrestling.

- 1) RIC FLAIR (34%)
- 2) BRET HART (12%)
- 3) CACTUS JACK (9%)
- 4) ARN ANDERSON (9%)
- 5) BOBBY EATON (6%)
- 6-10) Lightning Kid, Lex Luger, Steve Austin, Ted DiBiase, Hulk Hogan.

PAST WINNERS:

1990: Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, Sting.
1989: Ric Flair, Terry Funk, Lex Luger.
1988: Ric Flair, Ted DiBiase, Randy Savage.

COLUMNISTS COMMENTS

MARK MADDEN: Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, and Rick Rude. Nothing had more impact on the wrestling business in terms of dollars and sense than Ric Flair's jump to the WWF, although Vince McMahon could have made many more dollars if he had used a bit more sense. Besides steroid trials, tasteless angles, and a lying Hulk Hogan, nothing got wrestling insiders - as well as the general public - talking about wrestling more than Ric Flair's jump to the WWF. The Nature Boy is an easy choice for wrestler of the year, although we were still left wondering what might have... and should have... been had the WWF really put him over as the Real World Champion.

BRUCE MITCHELL: The only choice is the man who embodied the entire year in wrestling. The man who was at the center of every big story, who used the carnage of a war just to put himself over, the man who

mysteriously disappeared from the heart of a drug pusher's trial, the man blatantly lied on national television about the true course of his success, the man whose lazy work symbolized the state of the business in the ring, the man whose nickname "Real American" is beginning to take on a bitter irony - "Huuuuuulk Hooooogan". Second place goes to a guy whose hard, suicidal attitude took him from the fringes of the independent world to the top of WCW and a place in the heart of hardcore fans everywhere. Here is hoping that Cactus Jack can improve his work in the ring so it matches the brawling outside the ring. Maybe then he can avoid using that walker a few years longer.

ERIC KROL: Lex Luger. Despite his attitude problem, which may or may not be justified (how would you like it if Jim Herd was your boss?), he did a solid job as champion. believe it or not, I can rationalize voting for Luger. I mean, who could draw in WCW anyway? Remember, he had a decent match with Simmons where the champion actually was put over with his finisher. Don't forget the SuperBrawl tag match, either. Second goes to Ric Flair because, well, just because he's Ric Flair.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, and Bobby Eaton. Cactus Jack's workrate was tremendous and he had strong impact in two different promotions. Both Goodhart's TWA and the larger WCW were helped greatly by his

presence, attitude, and abilities. He has the ability to put together a solid match that is exciting, realistic, and at times surreal.

READER COMMENTS

STEVE SIMS: Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, and Lightning Kid are not only one, two, and three respectively for wrestler of the year, but also for Outstanding Wrestlers of the Year and MVPs of the Year.

RHONDA CLARK: Wrestler of the Year is Bret Hart. This was definitely Bret's year after years of being lost in the tag team shuffle. His win over Hennig proved he was a valuable player and world champion material.

MATT CREAMER: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, and Curt Hennig. It's best to vote for Flair now before it's too late. Vince McMahon is doing a wonderful job of devaluing the World's Greatest Wrestler and by this time next year, Flair may well be locked in

a half-star series of matches with Kerry Von Erich, or (cringe) Hacksaw Duggan. Still, he did tell Herd to stick it, and the charisma, prestige, and ringwork is still there, and he's still "The Man".

VINNIE CAROLAN: In an international poll, Jumbo Tsuruta would have it wrapped up.



WRESTLER OF THE YEAR: RIC FLAIR

Consistency is the key here and there is absolutely no wrestler who has been more valuable to his company on a nightly basis than Tsuruta. Ric Flair gets the first place vote in the States because he wrestled two "legends" in two different federations for the first time in his career and he made sure the matches were three stars or better. Even with the three month layoff during the summer, Flair's workrate for the whole year surpassed virtually everyone who would be considered in this category. As for second and third, there really is not anyone out there.

KEVIN VAN DYCK: First place has to go to Bushwacker Luke. Year after year, he sets the standard. Second place goes to El Gigante, the man who ran Ric Flair out of WCW and filled his shoes after Flair left. Third goes to Warlord. When he replaced Curt Hennig in the series of matches against Bret Hart, who could tell the difference?

KENNY VAUGAN: Ric Flair gets first place. Let's hope this is not the last time I vote him here. Curt Hennig gets second for being consistently good. Jerry Lawler is still able to carry anyone to a decent match, so he gets third.

JIMMY MARSHALL: Ric Flair, followed by Eddie Gilbert and Lex Luger. Nobody has beat the man yet and in 1991 he proved he could survive in either promotion.

ANTHONY SCALA: Being that "wrestler of the year" does not have to be a "worker" of the year, and he may not really practice what he preaches, I'll vote for Hulk Hogan only because there is no one that has done for wrestling what he has. Who else do the little kids look up to? Who else sells tickets and gets the crowds to explode like he does. Besides, he finally had a series of matches with Ric Flair. Flair gets second and Bret Hart gets third.

MARK COALE: Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, and Cactus Jack. I probably would not vote for Flair were he still WCW Champion, but his moving to Vinceland may be the most important wrestling story of the year. I do not look forward to seeing Flair do a job for Hogan at Wrestlemania, but will relish his two or three months as champ. Anderson is one of the few saving graces for the malaise WCW throughout most of this year. I hope the promise shown lately will keep on into 1992. Cactus Jack is my favorite American wrestler because he sacrifices himself for his profession. Jumbo Tsuruta would have been behind Flair on an international vote.

PAUL HANLIN JR.: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, and Lightning Kid. What a long list to choose, extending the length of a crack in the sidewalk. Who to pick... Hogan? Flair? Van "If

He Doesn't Win Every Torch Honor, Let Alone Rookie of the Year, They Shouldn't Have Voting" Hammer? Cactus Jack? Now you're talking. Truth or Consequences, NM's gift to wrestling was all that stood between me and chucking wrestling altogether as a devoted fan, approaching 20 years. Flair is a distant second, done in by Pizzamen and Whiffheads who truly haven't a clue as to how to promote him correctly. The thing is, you can still count on him in the ring. "Lightning Kid" Sean Waltman gets third. Waltman is everything a U.S. wrestler shouldn't be, but got over anyway.

DAN LENNARD: Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, and Bobby Eaton. In a sad year for U.S. wrestling, Ric Flair held firm. He was misused by WCW, treated like dirt by Dusty Rhodes and Jim Herd, and then dumped from the company that he had single-handedly held together for the better part of a decade. While Vince McMahon did his best to bury the "Nature Boy", it was a shrewd move by Flair to go to the WWF to finish his career on a high note.

JOHN BINDER: Curt Hennig. He only wrestled a half year, but a half year of Hennig is better than a full year from anyone else.

VIC LAU: Ric Flair, Jerry Lawler, and Lex Luger. Flair has once again demonstrated he is pro wrestling's one and only "star".

JEFF COHEN: Ric Flair. Never has one man so affected the fortunes of both major U.S. organization as Ric Flair did in 1991. Jim Herd's error may have in the long-run allowed WCW to develop younger talent, but the timing was grossly negligent.

TIM DAVIS: Even though he does not have a belt and he ruined his hair, Ric Flair has worked hardest and did his best to make this a great year. Unfortunately, the McMahon-factor got in the way.

CARLIE GILL: Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, Ric Flair. I wish I could list three runners-up because I would like to include Bret Hart. In my mind, those four were the cream of the crop over the past year. Amazing because none of them except Hart have been used correctly.

BOB FERRETTI: I still have to go with the

"Nature Boy" Ric Flair. No one had the bearing on the sport in 1991 like he did. He regained the World Title for a record tying seventh time. He was the talk of the wrestling world because of his firing by WCW and subsequent hiring by the WWF and his appearance in the WWF has almost single-handedly got the hardcores interested in the promotion again. What struck me the most is that throughout all the turmoil, he still maintained his dignity and class. Should I have expected anything else? Runners-up go to Lex Luger and Bret Hart.



BRET HART: #2 Wrestler

DAVE PRAZAK: Although this year had great many wrestlers who put together tremendous matches, my pick is be Ric Flair. He began the year winning the WCW World Title for record-tying seventh time. Flair had a few great matches with Brian Pillman as well as with El Gigante. Of course the controversial match from the TokyoDome between Flair and Tatum Fujinara put Flair in the international spotlight. Flair vs. Bobby Eaton on TV was

outstanding. Bringing the NWA belt he has worn so often to the WWF made for a regular entrance and immediately began the feud that may be remembered as the matches of the century with Hulk Hogan. Second place would have to go to the Undertaker for controlling the WWF. Third place goes to Hogan.

JIM MURPHY: He may not be as good worker as my vote for runners-up, Ric Flair or Bobby Eaton, but for a variety of reasons, Cactus Jack gets my vote for wrestler of the year. Everyone in the sport worked as hard night in and night out, wrestling wouldn't be in a state of decline. The man carried Van Hammer to three-star match at the last Clash, so obvious he can work. His love for the sport - expressed both in interviews and how he approaches each match - could be justification for this award itself. He is one of the few things that kept me watching WCW long enough to see what may be a very bright future for the promotion.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Ric Flair, Lex Luger and Bobby Eaton. Whooo! Whether you like or don't like it, you'd better learn to live with 'cause Ric Flair is still the best thing going today. What other wrestler could make hardcore fans take a serious interest in the WWF simply showing up there?

DON SMITH: Lightning Kid, Ric Flair, a

Arn Anderson: Lightning Kid epitomizes the ideal wrestler because he overcame all the negatives that make pro wrestling so embarrassing today and earned a well-deserved push based on hard work, perseverance, and talent. Flair deserves first runner-up status for all the reasons that intelligent wrestling fans already recognize. I voted for Anderson because week after week, month after month, he delivers quality match after quality match without any outlandish gimmicks or crutches.

EDDIE GOLDMAN: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Arn Anderson. All Cactus did this past year was become the main attraction in four different organizations, WCW, TWA, GWF, and UWF. His workrate with great opponents like Eddie Gilbert and awful opponents like Van Hammer was superb. No one did more to make the sport exciting and entertaining than Cactus Jack. Flair pumped life into two sagging organizations, although neither used him properly. He managed to shine despite bad management and booking. Anderson kept on a quality, steady course despite the fiascos in WCW. He maintained his dignity, style, and talent despite the likes of Jim Herd and Dusty Rhodes.

IAN GOODWIN: Arn Anderson, Cactus Jack, and Curt Hennig. Anderson gets first place for his consistently good workrate and overall greatness. Anderson is the most professional in professional wrestling. Cactus Jack has become one of the best workers and one of the best talkers, as well. Hennig deserves recognition for his injured performance at SummerSlam.

ANDY STOWELL: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, and Undertaker. Cactus Jack did more for himself this year than any other wrestler. He had a classic feud with Eddie Gilbert, including match of the year, as well as really livening up the UWF and Global. His arrival in WCW was the highspot of their worst year ever. Most importantly, Jack accomplished the goal he set for himself in a *Torch* interview earlier this year. He became a credible main event heel, not just a comedy wrestler. That makes him number one.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Ric Flair. Since entering the WWF, Flair has not been as good as in recent years, but he always tries to give the fans their money's worth. He is still, when allowed to be, the best representative of the sport. Arn Anderson follows. Anderson always puts on a great match and has a professionalism that gives the sport credibility. If every wrestler cared about the image of the sport and conducted themselves in the same manner as Anderson, non-fans would have more respect for the sport we love. Second runner-up goes to Ted DiBiase. DiBiase knows when to turn up the quality in a big match. He is the WWF's real excellence of

execution. With his maneuvers and workrate, he deserves a title in his WWF stay. I look forward to a Bret Hart vs. Ted DiBiase title feud.

JOSEPH PERRY: With Flair now being nothing more than an average Titan cartoon character and Hogan nothing more than a liar, who really deserves this award? No one I can think of off the top of my head. I decline to vote in this category.

ROSS LAIDLAW: Ric Flair. It is funny the effect one man can have. A guy comes into a place from a competing federation, an idea that was unthinkable a year ago considering he was the competition's main man. I had given up on the WWF long ago, but because of Flair, I started watching again. Bret Hart gets second because he was able to carve out a niche for himself in a federation where the federation did the carving. The results? He went over soundly as Intercontinental Champ and has a firm hold in the most popular ranks, not because of the angle or gimmick, but because of talent and ability. That says something. Cactus Jack gets third, as he is one of the best damn workers anywhere.

RYAN SCHURK: Bret Hart. Here is a man who began 1991 as co-holder of the WWF Tag Team Championship with Jim Neidhart, lost the belts at Wrestlemania VII, and then became the number one contender for the WWF Title by defeating Mr. Perfect for the Intercontinental Championship at Summerslam '91.

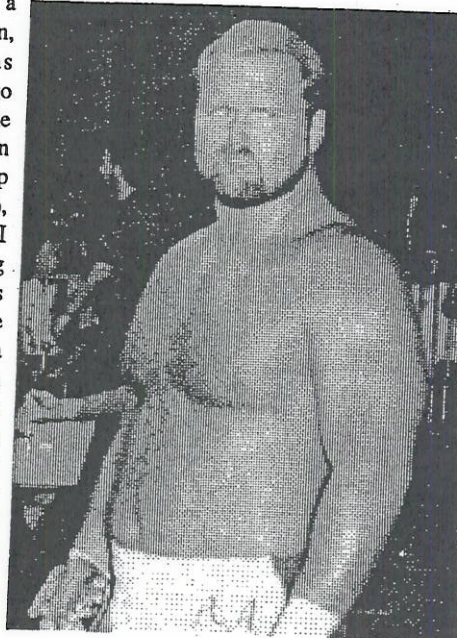
STUART BRYNIEN: Even the most casual Flair fan would have to admit that no one was in the news more than the stylin', smilin' Nature Boy, and for that reason alone (admittedly, Flair made headlines more for what he did out of the ring than in the ring), he deserves kudos as wrestling's man of the year. Number two goes out to Hulk Hogan who is still the top draw in his promotion and did nothing - at least among his bug-eyed Hulkamaniacs - to sully his reputation, or his popularity. Cactus Jack gets third. He toiled briefly for Global. He nearly sacrificed his life in that brutal barbed-wire match with Eddie Gilbert in Joel Goodhart's TWA and now he's spreading his own special brand of madness and

mayhem under the auspices of WCW. He brawls. He wrestles. He's fun to watch. What else is there?

RICK BARONE: Arn Anderson. I know some may think I am nuts, but if I owned WCW, I would be happy if all my wrestlers showed his professionalism, class, charisma, and genuine knowledge of what pro wrestling is supposed to be. In a year that so desperately needed someone or something to respect, and with Ric Flair in Titan, I can't think of anyone better for this award.

RYAN JONES: Bobby Eaton always tried, he was the ideal wrestler, and had great matches with Taylor and Austin. Cactus Jack and Arn Anderson are runners-up.

GENE HOLMAN: Flair is my favorite wrestler, but I feel that in a year dripping with controversy and poor wrestling, Flair was the only performer who kept me interested in the game. When he made his jump to Toon-town, I was dismayed. I knew he would end up doing a job for Hulk Hogan. I knew he would be humiliated by McMahon. I knew that all of the WWF fans would look at him and



ARN ANDERSON (#4)

mock his robes, his hair, his lack of chemically enhanced size. Still, when he showed up on Prime Time in all his regalia, complete with the most handsome belt in wrestling, I felt chills run up my spine. When he began his speech about his career and made his knocks against Hogan, I found myself actually getting excited about his tenure in Bizarro-land. I taped every Flair interview and squash matches. This is from a person who has personally boycotted every WWF PPV, tape, and TV shows previously. I ignored the track records of every former NWA champ who passed through the grappling wasteland, hoping this would be the time Hogan and McMahon would swallow their pride and allow a superior athlete a chance to shine. These hopes were dashed by the second-worst WWF PPV I have ever seen, 1991's Survivor Series. When I watched the horribly booked match that involved Flair and no one selling for him, the ripoff ending, I knew that Flair was never going to be allowed to shine in the WWF. Surprisingly enough, after the card, I felt even more respect for Flair. Sure, I had wasted 25 of my hard-earned shacksles. I had wasted not only my time, but the time of the ten people I invited to my home to view the card. Still, I marveled over the

power of the Nature Boy. No one, and I mean no one else could have gotten me to break my five year personal boycott of McMahon's product. No one. My boycott is back on now, due largely to Survivor Series.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Arn Anderson captures first. He is as fine an example as you could project for the sport. He sells, has a ton of offensive moves, does the job for others, puts others to shame with his interviews, and always works his butt off in tags or singles. He is everything I would want in a wrestler. Flair has just given far too much up to McMahon to deserve my consideration this year. Runners up go to Bobby Eaton and Curt Hennig.

DAN MACOSKO: Even in the face of adversity, he didn't disappear, but came back strong in the WWF, so Ric Flair is first. Bret Hart and Lex Luger are runners up.

ROB CONTICELLO: Ric Flair. His skills may be deteriorating, but he is still the most fun wrestler to watch inside and outside of the ring. Cactus Jack gets second because is the second most fun wrestler to watch. I was there in person for his matches against Eddie Gilbert in Philly and they were some of the best matches I have ever seen. Curt Hennig gets third just for the guts he showed wrestling against Bret Hart at Summerslam.

MARIE DALZELL: Ric Flair. I never thought I would see "Nature Boy" in the WWF. At least he does not have a circus type gimmick. I just hope it lasts.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: My top three picks go to Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, and Steve Austin. Ric Flair is fourth. Only due to circumstances beyond his control he probably had fewer great matches than the top

three picks. Flair started the year with matches against Eaton and Fujinami, but the Fujinami matches did not live up to expectations and the Eaton matches taped for TV were too short to shine. Eaton fits the definition of what this award represents. He epitomized what the ideal wrestlers should be during 1991. He is in the sport, not because of size, muscles, or interview ability. He is in this sport because he can get fans off their feet and into a match because of his wrestling ability. No other wrestler came closer to being consistently great than Eaton did, capping off the year against Austin a great series of matches. The same applies to Anderson except he is less versatile in the ring than Eaton, but out of the ring has interviews better than just about anybody. Austin avoided the sophomore jinx and convinced a lot of people he is the next franchise in this business. Hogan, normally a regular in this category, dishonored pro wrestling in 1991.

OUTSTANDING WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the wrestler who more than representing the sport was simply an outstanding worker. This wrestler had consistently good matches and always put full effort into their matches.

justifying his moniker as "one of the last real men" and Shawn Michaels was great despite being in the WWF all year. Geez, can he walk on water, too?

sake of taking maniacal bumps in his matches. Other than Ric Flair, no one else tries harder and puts their body through more punishment. Finally, Curt Hennig. Other than Bobby Eaton, no wrestler in the States flies through the air like Curt Hennig. He takes more bumps in a match than most other WWF stiffs do in a year.

- 1) RIC FLAIR (22%)
 - 2) CACTUS JACK (11%)
 - 3) ARN ANDERSON (11%)
 - 4) BOBBY EATON (10%)
 - 5) BRET HART (7%)
- 6-10) CURT HENNIG, LIGHTNING KID, STEVE AUSTIN, BRIAN PILLMAN, SHAWN MICHAELS

PAST WINNERS:

1990: RIC FLAIR, CURT HENNIG, BOBBY EATON

1989: RIC FLAIR, TERRY FUNK, RICK STEAMBOAT

CHRIS ZAVISA: Cactus Jack, Brian Pillman, and Curt Hennig. In August, I drove over 1000 miles to see Cactus Jack face Eddie Gilbert on Joel Goodhart's trilogy card. The performance by Jack was truly amazing and will stay in my memory for years to come. No other North American wrestler made that kind of impression in 1991.

ERIC KROL: Ric Flair gets the nod here, if only because he tried with Hogan. Although the WWF botched his entrance, Flair still proved he had it. he held up his end of the bargain in the dream match. Too bad Hogan didn't. Second goes to Bobby Eaton, who had an up-and-down year as far as pushes go. Eaton's work continued to improve and he actually looked pissed while walking to the ring at his Clash match. Imagine that, a wrestler actually caring that he had only 20 minutes to wrestle a three-fall match Third goes to Brian Pillman.

ADAM KAINE: Curt Hennig knows how to draw heat at an arena. His in-ring ability and interview skills are absolutely Perfect. He really seems to care about his craft, especially with his courageous four-star match at SummerSlam.

ANDY STOWELL: Lightning Kid, followed by Brian Pillman and Bobby Eaton. There was no one whose matches I watched as closely as those of the Kid. His style is the best in this country, a unique blend of Lucha Libre plus New Japan Junior Heavyweight, combined with such great smug arrogance that has not been seen since "Dr. D." David Shults was around. I just wish Kid was on the ESPN shows more often.

JOSEPH PERRY: I believe that Ric Flair did enough solid work before jumping to Titan to merit my vote in this category. I sure cannot see him getting this award next year if the current trend continues.

ROSS LAIDLAW: Arn Anderson is a technical wonder. Experienced enough to be the crafty veteran, but young enough to take wrestling into the next century. And he has got everything it takes to be wrestler of the year except the most essential thing that any wrestler seems to need these days: A ring presence like a Hogan or a Flair. The fact is, Arn Anderson was

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: No matter what happens in the front office, Bobby Eaton's work stays at a high level.

MARK MADDEN: Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, and Shawn Michaels. Hey, Denny Terrio didn't always have a good partner, but he was still always the best thing on Dance Fever. Just ask Merv Griffin. Anyway, no matter who he was matched with or how little they tried (Hi, Sting and Hulk), Ric Flair was still the best thing going in North American wrestling. Arn Anderson graced WCW with an elegant brutality

READER COMMENTS

MIKE O'BRIEN: Ric Flair. Flair was once again an outstanding worker and put forth full effort in his matches this year. Unfortunately, he was stuck with so-called wrestlers like El Gigante and the non-selling, less-than-stiff Roddy Piper this year. I was lucky to see him wrestle seven times this year and he always put forth more effort than anyone else. Cactus Jack gets the second place vote. It seems as if Cactus is willing to sacrifice his body and career for the

born too late. If these were the sixties, he would be wrestler of the year, guaranteed. Second goes to Bret Hart, who most people knew was a good wrestler when he tagged with Jim Neidhart. This year he was able to show everyone what he could do on his own.

RYAN SCHURK: Ric Flair. Although he is one of the best scientific wrestlers in the sport, his performances in the WWF needed a major overhaul. His team's match at Survivor Series, which could have been the best of the night, had a very embarrassing finish. Flair is too good of an athlete and the WWF is too good of a wrestling organization to be happy with that kind of an ending. It is a shame that Flair does not have the same quality matches as when he was with WCW.

STUART BRYNIEN: Ted DiBiase, who is a personal favorite. He never seems to let what is going on around him in the WWF affect his performance in or out of the ring. He gives the fans their money's worth, combining a seamless blend of skill and showmanship that his fellow WWFers would be wise to try to emulate. His Summerslam clash with Virgil was one of the best matches on a pretty strong card. Second goes to Dustin Rhodes. Yes, Rhodes. I am one of the few New Yorkers who does not start booing at the mere mention of the Natural's name. He should not have to suffer for the sins of his father. Fact is, he is a terrific worker who almost always turns in an exciting, fast-paced match. He is very skillful and he's still just a kid. Does a great job in tag matches, too. Third goes to Bobby Eaton, who deserves an award just for having to deal with so much disrespect from his own promotion. WCW turned him into a face, started giving him a big singles push, stopped, and then finally transformed him back into a heel. Through it all, Beautiful Bobby was what he has always been: a quietly efficient wrestler who knows how to move, knows how to sell, and is willing to do whatever he is told. Like DiBiase, a credit to his organization.

RYAN JONES: What can be said about Cactus Jack. He will do anything and does do anything. One of these days he is bound to kill himself. Runners up, Steve Austin - the future of

wrestling - and Bobby Eaton.

GENE HOLMAN: Curt Hennig. His match at SummerSlam showed me that a truly great wrestler can ignore the pain of his suffering bodyparts to put on an excellent match, a better one than most of the healthy so-called "Superstars" in the WWF.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, and Curt Hennig. I do not care what time it takes place, Anderson always gives it 100 percent and is exceptional in every facet of the wrestling game. You are never shortchanged by the master of the spinebuster. The same goes with Bobby Eaton. Guys like Luger and Sting with these huge chips on their shoulders should look at him. If anybody deserves to be bitter, it's Eaton. He was screwed at every turn for a year, yet he is still one of the finest in the world. Business is business with Eaton and not too many do it better.

ROB CONTICELLO: Arn Anderson gets first, one of the last true wrestlers. He always worked hard during his matches and gave entertaining tough-guy interviews. Cactus Jack, a great brawler who takes more chances in the ring than anyone. Brian Pillman. I think he really strived to improve this year. He took more chances in the ring and frequently was involved in the best matches on WCW cards.

MARIE DALZELL: Bobby Eaton. Whether he wrestles as a face or a heel, he always put his all in his matches and gives 110 percent.

JOSEPH MARGOSIAN: Ric Flair gets first. Arn Anderson gets second. Don't even bother to argue with me. The man is a throw-back to old-time wrestling. Along with Flair, he personifies the greats of the past today. Third goes to Bobby Eaton.

LENNY SKOROS: Cactus Jack. He brought out the best in Sting. He had good matches with Van Hammer. 'Nuff said. Bret Hart, the best wrestler in the WWF. Ric Flair, who left his best working shoes in Atlanta, gets third. Hogan and Piper have not been the best of opponents for Flair.

IAN GOODWIN: Cactus Jack, Arn

Anderson, and Steve Austin. Cactus has had the best matches with the most diverse opponents. Hell, he had good matches with Van Hammer! Anderson has worked hard all year while Steve Austin gets better and better and is the next big star in the sport.

JIM MURPHY: Bobby Eaton, who gave 110% in every match despite being treated like dirt by WCW management. Runners-up: Ric Flair and Curt Hennig.

DAVE PRAZAK: Once again, seven-time NWA/WCW Champ Ric Flair receives this award. Going the distance with Scott Steiner on the Clash of the Champions, putting together two great matches with Japanese rival Tatsumi Fujinami, and constantly wrestling Hulk Hogan in good matches makes Flair the logical choice for this award. Bret Hart gets second place for his great matches with Curt Hennig and Ted DiBiase, and his tag action. Third goes to Brian Pillman for wrestling good matches with Ric Flair, Brad Armstrong, and Barry Windham.

CARLIE GILL: Even when Arn Anderson was stuck with a lousy opponent like Van Hammer or Bill Kazmaier, he came through with a watchable match. Bret Hart deserves better than Berzerker and The Warlord. I can't wait until Hennig is healthy again. Finally, Bobby Eaton has consistently provided great wrestling and kept an incredibly good attitude, considering all he has been put through. In the air or on the mat, Bobby Eaton never fails to do his job to the best of his ability.

BOB FERRETTI: Bret Hart is my pick because he continues night after night to be one of the top wrestlers in the sport and with his singles push, I think that became evident moreso this year than others. He also was not involved in the politics of the sport that cost Flair this award this year. Runners-up are Shawn Michaels and Ric Flair.

VIC LAU: Ric Flair because he actually carried El Gigante to a three-star match. Curt Hennig and Bobby Eaton follow.

JEFF COHEN: Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, and Bret Hart. Anderson was able to have tremendous feuds with Doom, Renegade Warriors, The Steiners, Bobby Eaton, Brian Pillman, and the new Rhodes & Steamboat combination despite having to team with the likes of Larry "The Staller" Zbyszko. For a cagey veteran, this was a career year.

DAN LENNARD: Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, and Randy Savage. Anderson was the complete company wrestler in 1991. He had great shoot interviews, great matches, great feuds, and when the company called for it, he did



CURT HENNIG: #6

jobs to undeserving geeks like Van Hammer. best. Double A is a man's man.

PAUL HANLIN JR.: Cactus Jack, Lightning Kid, and Ric Flair. In front of 5,000 fans or 500, Cactus Jack delivered the goods every time. Tri-State, Global, WCW; take your pick. Lightning Kid has better moves, but seeing Jack in the best North American mach of 1991 cemented his standing.

MARK COALE: Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, and Ric Flair. Although Eaton and Anderson are not the greatest technical wrestlers, they are the real total packages in the wrestling business. The same could also be said for Flair, although his technical ability is above the other two.

JIMMY MARSHALL: Ric Flair, Curt Hennig, and Ted DiBiase. The federation with some of the worst workers also has three of the

KENNY VAUGAN: Cactus Jack gets first because he is the best reason to watch WCW. He is unbelievable. Rick Steamboat single-handedly helped set WCW right. Well... almost.

KEVIN VAN DYKE: Warlord gets first. Some people are under the mistaken impression that he is lazy. They just don't recognize the expert pacing of a master. Undertaker gets second. He's almost as good. Hercules third. What can you say? He's been at or near the top for years.

LENNY SKOROS: Cactus Jack. he brought out the best in Sting and had good matches with Van Hammer. 'Nuff said! Bret Hart, the WWF's best worker, gets second place. Ric Flair left his best working shoes in Atlanta, but then again, Hogan and Piper don't sell well.

MATT CREAMER: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, and Bobby Eaton. Just when WCW looked about ready to shrivel up and die, Cactus added a major spark to Jim and Ted's Bogus Venture. His ring work is consistently great. His and Abdullah's Sting-bashing interviews were classics. Is there a bump he won't take?

RHONDA CLARK: Sting. After a disappointing start, he more than made up for it. Fans and wrestlers respect him and he always puts forward a full effort in every match.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Shawn Michaels was the most outstanding wrestler in 1991. Janetty is good, but Michaels, like Austin, is one of the few potential franchise wrestlers out there today. Second goes to Ric Flair, who deserves recognition as the master of this sport. Pillman gets third and is on the tier right below Michaels when it comes to the future of this business.

MVP OF THE YEAR

This is a new award this year which goes to the wrestler who was the most valuable to their promotion, that without this wrestler, the promotion would have the largest void to fill. This wrestler should be more than a token wrestler, and instead should be "the franchise".

- 1) HULK HOGAN (38%)
- 2) RIC FLAIR (17%)
- 3) STING (15%)
- 4) LEX LUGER (8%)
- 5) JERRY LAWLER (5%)
- 6-10) Cactus Jack, The Patriot, Lightning Kid, Curt Hennig, Undertaker.

Ultimate Warrior is gone. That leaves Hogan, perpetrator of one of the biggest scams in history on the American public with his Hulk Hogan act, but he was still the MVP of wrestling in 1991.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Sting, Hulk Hogan, and Lex Luger. I was going to give this to the Hulkster, but with all the publicity about the steroid problem, Hogan could well be Titan's greatest liability in 1992. Sting has been pushed down our throats, but with the injuries to Scott Steiner and Barry Windham, who else did WCW really have? If (and that is one mighty qualification) used properly, Sting could be the foundation for a rebirth of WCW.

BRUCE MITCHELL: The departure of Ric Flair had a devastating effect on one national company. The arrival of Ric Flair could have possibly saved another.

and became a star in the WWF, and quite likely champ. Plus, he has drawn enormous fan reaction while working for both organizations. Who else? Second goes to Hulk Hogan based only on his marquee value and nothing more. McMahon expects him to bring in the kids and the softcores, and he does, although not the numbers he once did. Enough of the PPVs keep selling and the turnstiles keep clicking, and the merchandise keeps raking in the bucks. Third goes to Eddie Gilbert. I have not even seen him in months, but he a) was a top heel in the USWA, b) wrestled that match with Cactus Jack at the TWA show in Philly, and c) is now the number one heel and driving force behind Joe Pedicino's GWF. In other words, he has starred for no fewer than three organizations in the last twelve months alone. How can he be denied?

RICK BARONE: Ric Flair. All you have to do is look at the shambles that WCW is in after his departure to come up with this one.

RYAN JONES: Hulk Hogan. Without Hogan, McMahon would be up the creek, but let's see what happens next year with the steroid controversy. Runner up, Sting.

GENE HOLMAN: Sting, I guess. Anyone who could have such a lackluster championship run and still get pushed to the moon must mean something to his company.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Putting my personal feelings aside, it goes without saying that Hulk Hogan is everything to the WWF. They tried Warrior and they can go ahead and try Justice. Hogan knows his worth to the promotion and has

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

MARK MADDEN: Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, and Rick Rude & Cactus Jack tied for third. Hogan is an absolutely worthless human being with, as far as I can see, no redeeming qualities whatsoever that are not worked for the benefit of propping up his popularity. But the WWF would be in a lot of trouble without Hulk Hogan. To show how quickly things can change, in a very short while they will be in a lot of trouble if they still have him. Special mention to Slick Ric, who revitalized the whole wrestling business in general, and to Cactus Jack, who kept WCW fans watching until Rick Rude got there to further pick things up.

ERIC KROL: Who else? Sting and Luger don't draw flies, but then again, does anyone?

READER COMMENTS

JOSEPH PERRY: Hulk Hogan and the WWF have shown that they are like Siamese twins... one has little chance of surviving without the other.

RYAN SCHURK: Hulk Hogan. Vince McMahon, if he has not already, should start looking for new talent capable of taking the spotlight once the "Leader of Hulkamania" retires. Because once Hogan is gone, there is a good chance that WCW could finally replace the WWF as the number one wrestling federation.

STUART BRYNIEN: Ric Flair. He was the star of WCW. He signed on with McMahon

McMahon over a barrel. Herd and WCW realized how important Flair was with their repeated offers after his "firing" and his departure with the belt. They had a lot of rebuilding to do with the hardcores after his dismissal and are slowly but surely in that process. Third runner up goes to Jerry Lawler of the USWA.

DAN MACOSKO: Ric Flair. For months, fans kept chanting "We Want Flair", proving his value. Hulk Hogan gets second. Even with all the war and steroid stuff, he still was the WWF's flagship wrestler. Sting gets third. Even though I would rather see Steve Austin or Dustin Rhodes or Scott Steiner win the belt, Sting has still proven to be the lead face. If programmed right, next time he may draw better.

STEVE FISCHER: Who else can you pick? Hulk Hogan is to the WWF what chocolate is to Hershey.

MARIE DALZELL: Hulk Hogan. As much as I dislike him, the WWF would never be the same without him. Hey, what a great idea!

JEFF BENSON: Don't laugh, but it really does go to Ric Flair. His entrance into the WWF has really not meant as much as most people thought, but the crowds for his matches with Hogan, though far under what everyone expected, were still the biggest in some time; don't expect to see the crowds back to that size anytime soon.

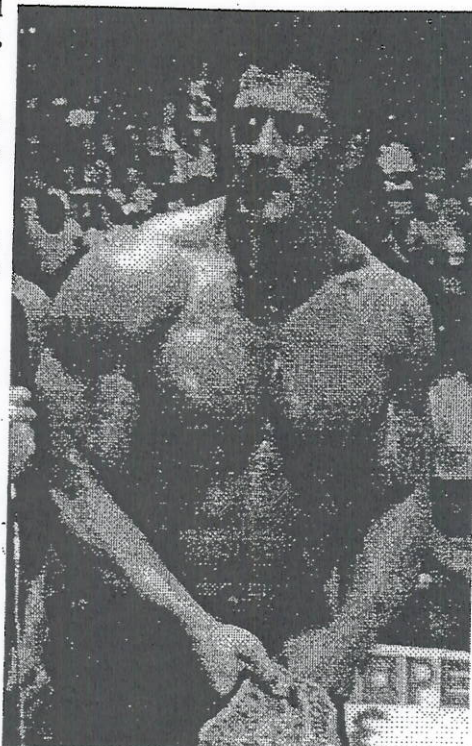
IAN GOODWIN: Sting, Curt Hennig, and Lex Luger. No matter what you say about him, Sting still gets the biggest pops at WCW house shows. He may have finally been resurrected and rejuvenated with Cactus Jack and Rick Rude. As Titan's top worker, Curt Hennig's absence in the ring has really been felt. Luger stepped into a bad situation and has performed well as a heel champion.

ANDY STOWELL: Curt Hennig, Arn Anderson, and Ric Flair. Summerslam '91 firmly entrenched Hennig as an all-time MVP. No one expected much since Hennig was hurt so badly, but he put on the show of his life and made Bret Hart look as good as they push him on Superstars.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Hulk Hogan. Hogan seems as if he has no pride in his work and knows that he is so popular that he does not have to put forth effort to receive the accolades of the fans. Even with this he has charisma and means not only "WWF", but is the name that people identify wrestling with in the U.S. Without him, the WWF would be a great deal closer to the level of WCW. Sting and Lex Luger are runners-up.

ERIC KROL: Hulk Hogan. Who else? Sting and Luger don't draw flies (can anyone?) and Warrior is gone. Yes, Terry Bollea has perpetrated one of the biggest scams in history on the American public with his Hulk Hogan act, but he is still the man.

ANTHONY SCALA: Hulk Hogan. WWF shows are lackluster without Warrior. WCW could sure use Ric Flair back. But could you imagine if Hogan left the WWF? Could you imagine the main events at house shows? At pay-per-views? Runners-up are Ultimate Warrior and Ric Flair.



"THE PATRIOT" DEL WILKES (without mask)

MARK COALE: Hulk Hogan, Jerry Lawler, and Ric Flair. Hogan's value as champion was proven when the Dingo as champ experiment failed. Jerry Lawler is Memphis wrestling. The frequency and volume of the "We Want Flair" chants that surfaced throughout July and August showed his belated value to the NWA.

JOSEPH MARGOSIAN: My vote goes to those wrestlers without whom there would be no organization - the MVPs of all groups: the jobbers. Many of them are equal to or better in talent than the major stars. Yes, the jobbers, who because of their love of wrestling, have to put up with the greedy, ignorant promoters; who have to produce the injury-threatening bumps, and face the stiff shots to feed the coffers and egos of pumped-up steroid freak-prima donnas who have no idea of what pro wrestling is all about. Just once, I would like to see a jobber in his last

match before retiring, give Rick Steiner a stiff clothesline that would rattle his teeth and render him unconscious. At least Terry Taylor showed compassion for his fellow wrestler when he accidentally bloodied a jobber.

DAN LENNARD: Hulk Hogan, Scott Steiner, and Sting. Under the definition for this award, there is no way you cannot give this award to Hogan. He remains the franchise wrestler for Titan, although his appeal continues to diminish every year. But who is going to replace him? The absence of Scott Steiner from WCW for most of '91 showed how much they need him to maintain fan interest in their product.

UNKNOWN #1: Hulk Hogan, Lex Luger, and Ric Flair. Why not rename this the "Hulk Hogan Award"? No matter what anyone says, Hogan means more to the WWF than every other wrestler in the company.

JEFF COHEN: Hulk Hogan. Say what you will about Hogan (and you will), but imagining the WWF without him would be pretty tough. He filled the top of many garbage cards in 1991, perhaps the largest number of slow gates in the post-84 history of the Fed.

VIC LAU: Jerry Lawler, Sting, and Hulk Hogan. Memphis wrestling as a regional promotion would be dead without Lawler.

TIM DAVIS: WCW proved it could live without Flair, but can the WWF survive without Hulk Hogan? He stinks as a wrestler, but he is the only drawing power McMahon has.

BOB FERRETTI: I'll go with Hulk Hogan because I believe that more than any wrestler, he is the heart and sole of his promotion and the brand of wrestling that they want to get over. One can argue Flair, but his own hierarchy did not think enough of him to keep him. I have no doubt that the WWF would never let Hogan go and be snatched up by their main rival.

RHONDA CLARK: Ric Flair. Flair proved to be the MVP for the WWF and WCW and WCW has not yet found anyone to fill the void he left.

MATT CREAMER: Hulk Hogan, Sting, and Lex Luger. His morals are comparable to a prostitute who solicits widowers at their wife's funerals, but the WWF continues to revolve to the tired old exploits of Hulk Hogan. Wouldn't be the same ol' circus without him.

KEVIN VAN DYCK: Saba Simba gets first. Is it a mere coincidence that WWF attendance and buyrates are down since he left? Barry Horowitz, second, is the one man Joe

Pedicino cannot afford to lose. Third is a tie between Todd Champion and Firebreaker Chip. The U.S. belts gained new prestige during their legendary reign.

KENNY VAUGAN: Cactus Jack is first. If Cactus is on the bill, that is all I need to know. Bobby Eaton can do it all, but really needs Cornette by his side. Third, Eddie Gilbert, is an MVP wherever he goes.

DAVE PRAZAK: The obvious choice for the MVP of the Year is Hulk Hogan. The WWF would be nothing more than a big circus if it didn't have a ringleader like the Hulkster. Although not a great wrestler, Hogan made the WWF what it is, and without his image, who would the WWF have to rely on to be its top man? The Ultimate Warrior? No, he's gone. How about Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Nope. Retired most of the year and a newlywed (give me a break). The WWF would just not be what it is if Hogan was not part of it this year. Second place goes to Lex Luger. WCW made Lex into a great heel champion that could only be the best replacement as far as a hateable champion goes. WCW would have been lost without Luger. Third place goes to "Patriot" Del Wilkes, who made the GWF a success by representing the USA. Wilkes provided Global with a great foundation.



STING

JIM MURPHY: The obvious first choice is Flair, but WCW seems to be taking some serious steps to filling the void left by his departure, so I guess he just gets to be runner up. Where would the Fed be without Terry Bollea? Every attempt to pass the torch to a successor seems to end disastrously. Don't get me wrong, Hogan is a first class jerk, but I really can't think of anyone more valuable to his promotion. Another runner up would probably be Jerry Lawler in Memphis.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Honesty dictates that this award goes to the Hulkster. No other promotion in modern history has been so dependent on a single wrestler as the WWF is on Hogan. Ultimate Warrior could not be groomed as his successor last year and don't bet on Sid Justice next year.

DON SMITH: Hulk Hogan, Lex Luger, and Sting. When Hogan finally calls it quits, he will reduce the power and popularity of the WWF by about 40 percent. No other wrestler in any promotion, past or present, has been so crucial - including Ric Flair.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: As the early weeks of 1992 showed, Hulk Hogan may be in line for the BLP of the Year in 1992 - "Biggest Liability Player". But in 1991, without Hogan, it would have been a tough year for the WWF. Ric Flair's void was still felt in main event matches for WCW as 1991 came to a close. Cactus Jack gets third. Jack had tremendous impact wherever he went, which also inherently means he would leave a large void whenever he left. Jack brings an unreplaceable style to the ring and to a promotion that cannot easily be duplicated. Honorable mention to Lightning Kid who set the GWF apart from the USWA or another "third promotion" with a unique look and style that could prove to be the trend of the coming years.

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

This award encompasses all three of the above awards into one tag team, in that they represent the pro wrestling business well, they were outstanding workers during the year, and they are valuable to their promotion, with the third quality being the least important.

- 1) THE STEINERS (26%)
- 2) ARN ANDERSON & LARRY ZBYSZKO (22%)
- 3) THE ROCKERS (17%)
- 4) LEGION OF DOOM (16%)
- 5) THE NASTY BOYS (6%)
- 6-10) Young Pistols, Hart Foundation, Beverly Brothers, Jeff Jarrett & Robert Fuller, Orient Express.

PAST WINNERS:

1990: Steiners, Midnight Express, Butch Reed & Ron Simmons
 1989: Anderson & Blanchard, Rockers, Legion of Doom
 1988: Midnight Express, Fantastics, Legion of Doom

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Rick & Scott Steiner, The Rockers, and Rick Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes. The Steiners edge the Rockers with their vastly superior work in Japan. Both teams work well in the States, but Choshu and New Japan know how to use the Steiners in Japan while SWS badly handles the equally talented Rockers.

MARK MADDEN: Rockers, Rick & Scott Steiner, and Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko. It figures. Vince gets a tag team that satisfied the hardcores almost every night out, then he breaks 'em up. Thanks Shawn and Marty, it was great while it lasted. Number two is the handicap team of the Steiner Brothers, with Scott carrying lazy lummo Rick every night. Hey, d'ya suppose that's how he blew his bicep out? And the team of Anderson & Zbyszko's mouth...

BRUCE MITCHELL: Barry Windham & Arn Anderson were excellent while they lasted. The Rockers had a great match with the Orient Express, but most of their work was uninspiring. Steamboat & Rhodes and Eaton & Anderson were high-quality teams but were not around

most of the year. The Steiners started out as if no one would ever touch them, but their predictable injury problems grounded them. The best, most consistent team for the entire year was the Young Pistols even though they were low on the cards.

ERIC KROL: This is a tough one because not many decent teams were together the whole year. I will agree with Bill Apter and pick The Enforcers as my team of the year. Second, by default, goes to the Steiners. The Legion of Doom really does not deserve a mention because they are just another meaningless cog in the Titan juggernaut. Yes, they did complete the triple crown, but, like tag titles mean anything anymore in the first place.

READER COMMENTS

MARK CREAMER: Steiners, Enforcers, Nasty Boys. The tag scene was kind of anemic this year, more due to injuries than anything else, but the Steiners still outshine everything else here. They worked excellently against the best of New Japan. Their match against the "No Job Boys" (Sting & Luger) at SuperBrawl was surprisingly great.

RHONDA CLARK: The Legion of Doom. I believe they edge out The Enforcers by a little. Animal and Hawk deserve this distinction after becoming the first tag team in history to capture the WCW, AWA, and WWF tag team titles.

VINNIE CAROLAN: Although they only wrestled as a team for half the year, The Steiners deserve it for the second year because they had three match of the year candidates in a period of four months. The Hase & Sasaki match from the Starrcade Tokyo Dome show, Luger & Sting at SuperBrawl, and the Hase & Chono match at the June Clash. What other team could achieve that great feat in one whole year, let alone in four months?

VIC LAU: The Enforcers, Legion of Doom, and Jeff Jarrett & Robert Fuller. Anderson & Zbyszko had a great work ethic, did great interviews, and were right when they said they were the last real men on Earth.

JEFF COHEN: The Steiners, Legion of Doom, and Steve Williams & Terry Gordy. Despite the missed time, The Steiners will headline cards as singles or a tag team for the remainder of the decade if they remain healthy. Possibly the next dominant American combo; The Road Warriors of the 90s.

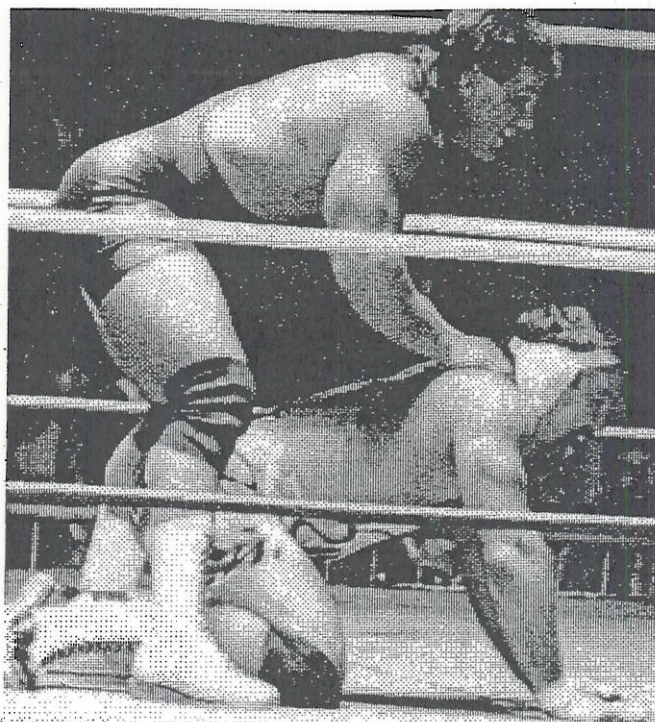
UNKNOWN #1: The Rockers, The Steiners, and The Legion of Doom. The Rockers did what no one else could; carry anyone to a good match. The Steiners were close because of their importance to WCW, but they were not around throughout a large chunk of the year.

DAN LENNARD: Steiners, Rockers, and Nasty Boys. A tough one. The guys who should have won it hands down, The Steiners, were not a team for the last seven months of the year. However, there was no other U.S. team that had a really good year, although The Rockers and Nasty Boys had their moments. The Steiners did more in the first five months than other teams do all year. They narrowly get my vote.

PAUL HANLIN JR.: WrestleWar, Starrcade in the TokyoDome; SuperBrawl; the June Clash of the Champions. What did these things have in common? This duo was always in the best match on the card. Obviously, the Steiners. Second are the Rockers. They stick out in Titan like a sore thumb, as wrestlers who put out 100 percent in the ring.

MARK COALE: Steiners, Enforcers, and

Am Anderson & Bobby Eaton. Though none of the teams on my list wrestled together the whole year, there are better than 99 percent of the teams that wrestled the entire year together. The one exception was The Rockers, who are not long for this world.



RICK & SCOTT STEINER: TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

ANTHONY SCALA: Rockers. Night after night, they went into the ring and had consistently good matches. They make up for their size with well-deserved team moves and isn't that what tag team wrestling is all about? LOD and Steiners are runners-up.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Steiners, Enforcers, and Rockers. Even though the Steiners have only wrestled together for the first half of the year, they are still the most physically intense and technically sound tag team in the U.S. I picked the Enforcers as a close second. They fit in the mold of the Blanchard & Anderson no-nonsense, kick ass, professional type tag team that have respect for the business. Third, I chose the Rockers because of their workrate and skills deserved the tag team titles before they split. They have been the best tag team in the WWF for years.

ADAM KAINE: It has to be the Rockers from the 1991 Royal Rumble to the Survivors, those two were consistent. I like the idea of turning Michaels heel, but it would be better to also turn Marty Jannetty. Jannetty will probably end up in a Kato role in the WWF putting Van Hammer-types over.

ANDY STOWELL: Rick & Scott Steiner, The Nasty Boys, and Dustin Rhodes & Ricky

Steamboat. Okay, I've heard everybody's knocks against the Steiners, saying they only worked part of the year, but I'm looking at what they did do rather than what they didn't. Think of these matches: WarGames '91; vs. Hase & Sasaki; vs. Sting & Luger; vs. Hase & Chono. Your going to remember those for years to come. Name another tag team that had even a couple of matches as good as the Steiners. You cannot, and that's why they're the best in the U.S.

IAN GOODWIN: Enforcers, Nasty Boys, Rockers. Giving Anderson & Zbyszko the tag straps was one of WCW's best moves all year and gave the promotion some credibility. The Nasty Boys are underrated workers and great heels. It is sad and senseless that McMahon is breaking up the Rockers.

TIM WHITEHEAD: The Enforcers. Anderson & Zbyszko are the epitome of what a no-nonsense tag team should be like, No gimmicks, solid ringwork, and hot interviews. The Enforcers are the way wrestling used to be, but rarely is today.

JIM MURPHY: Despite that their year was cut short by injury, the Steiners had enough great matches before Scott Steiner's bicep tear to last many teams a lifetime. No one in America can touch them. Runners up: A distant second to the Rockers, who are hampered by being in the Fed. Kudos also to the team of Abdullah & Cactus Jack, what a monster heel tag team should be.

KENNY VAUGHN: The Enforcers are the best combination in years, able to do it all and make it all look real. Why is it when WCW gets a good team, when they really start to click, WCW breaks them up? It also happened to Doom. What timing. Second place goes to the Legion of Doom. They are not as great as they once were, but they deserve mention. Rockers get third for night after night excellence.

KEVIN VAN DYKE: First place goes to The Creatures. And people laughed at Jim Herd. Second place: Bill Kazmaier and anybody! Third place goes to The Natural Disasters, the team that makes you say, "Now *this* is wrestling!"

STEVE SIMS: The Steiners, The Rockers, and The Enforcers. I believe there was a solid gap between first and second, and second and third. The Steiners were so good, I list them at number three in the world even though they only worked until June 14 this year plus the end of November. The Rockers were super, but had no

opponents at their level. The Enforcers were the last real wrestlers in WCW after Scott Steiner was injured, but they were not together long enough to earn a spot any higher than third.

JOSEPH

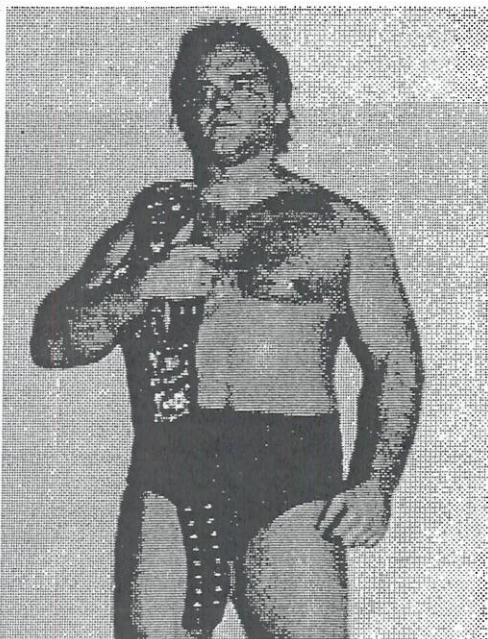
PERRY: Cactus Jack and Abdullah the Butcher. I hope I'm not the only person to cast a vote for this pair. They brought a fresh spontaneity to their interviews and a tough brawling style to their tag matches. Jack said it best: "Don't you know that violence can be beautiful."

ROSS

LAIDLAW: The Road Warriors. AWA, NWA, and WWF Tag Team

Champs and they haven't lost any of their charm. The Enforcers are second. I miss Tully Blanchard. His retirement depressed me. But when Arn Anderson started teaming with Larry Zbyszko, it helped ease the pain. There will never be another team like Blanchard & Anderson, but Anderson & Zbyszko come damn

close. Third goes to The New Foundation. It may be premature, but I see great talent there.



LARRY ZBYSZKO (#2)

year, it would have gone to them, no problem. The Roadies pulling off the tag title hat trick is good enough to get it for them in a lackluster year.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: The Rockers, Steiners, and Enforcers. Why are they breaking

RICK BARONE: The Steiners by default. I know that they only wrestled half the year, but since my favorite team no longer exists (Doom) and no other team is deserving, they get my vote.

RYAN JONES: The Rockers. It would be the Steiners, but because of their injury, the Rockers get first. Michaels was incredible this year and has great cockiness. He will make a great heel.

GENE

HOLMAN: The Road Warriors by default. If the Steiners had been active as a team all

up the Rockers? Two working as one, just like a tag team should. I wish they would have left for WCW when they gave their notice. They are as fluid a team as you will ever see. Second goes to the Steiners, who are honestly still the best tag team in the world if they decide to put them back together. Scott does not look like he lost anything after the bicep injury. The Enforcers deserve third on their "real men" interviews alone.

ROB CONTICELLO: The Steiners, for holding both the WCW and IWGP titles at the same time. They had great matches against Hase & Sasaki, Hase & Chono, and Sting & Luger. Legion of Doom for finally completing the triple crown of wrestling by winning the WWF title. Enforcers get third. They were great while they teamed. No tag team gave better interviews.

MARIE DALZELL: The Legion of Doom, simply because they are the only team in history to hold the three major tag team championships. They rely on power, but can wrestle with the best of them.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

Number one goes to The Enforcers for all of the reasons stated on the last few pages. Their match against Steamboat & Rhodes at the November Clash was a fitting cap to Zbyszko & Anderson as a team. The Steiners get second for coming up with great matches on the big shows. Third goes to The Rockers for sheer excellence.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best rookie wrestler who not only showed skill throughout the year, but showed potential to grow as a wrestler and a desire to get better. Wrestlers eligible are those who have been in the business less than five years and until this year never worked full-time for a national promotion. Mainly the wrestlers eligible were those who worked for the WWF, WCW, GWF, and USWA before Aug. 15, 1991.

1) LIGHTNING KID (43%)

2) JOHNNY B. BADD (37%)

3) JERRY LYNN (9%)

4) CHAZ TAYLOR (6%)

5) VAN HAMMER (2%)

PAST WINNERS:

1990: Steve Austin, El Gigante, J.W. Storm

1989: Wayne Bloom, Dustin Rhodes, Larry Cameron

1988: Scott Steiner, Ricky Rice, Derrick Dukes

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

ERIC KROL: Well, we should not have this award because Van Hammer is not getting it. Oh, well, cast my vote for Johnny B. Badd. He has a great gimmick, seems to want to learn, and is only improving. Second here goes to *Torch* pet Lightning Kid who would have gotten first if he wrestled more matches.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Some people are going completely overboard for the Lightning Kid, giving him the kind of praise that befits a veteran legend. Kid still has a lot to learn and must prove himself in a major circuit. But for now, he shows a lot of raw ability, tons of desire, and a willingness to do nearly anything to get over. That is better than any other rookie on the scene today and should take Kid a long way in this business. Runners up: Billy Black and Debbie Malenko.

MARK MADDEN: Lightning Kid, Johnny B. Badd, and Jerry Lynn. I have seen the future of wrestling in the 90s and it is not Sean "Lightning Kid" Waltman, which is why there

may be no wrestling by the end of the 90s.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Anyone who saw Lightning Kid's work in Global, his high-flying style and snotty persona, forgot about the second coming of Jimmy Garvin. Struck by Lightning Kid.

READER COMMENTS

LENNY SHORES: Lightning Kid. I hope he gets a break with one of the major promotions. He deserves it. Johnny B. Badd is good enough for second. He's a bad man, but getting better each day.

ELYSE ZOIS: Johnny B. Badd is the best of a truly awful bunch.

MATT CREAMER: Lightning Kid, Johnny B. Badd, and Jerry Lynn. Poor Lightning Kid. All that talent and chances are he will never get into the WWF or WCW where so many more could appreciate his talents because he won't chemically alter himself. The first time I saw kid on TV, I laughed; I'm not laughing anymore.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Lightning Kid, Johnny B. Badd, and Jerry Lynn. The Lightning Kid is a superb athlete who knows the sport of wrestling and always seems to come up with added moves in his repertoire with every match. If the emphasis on steroid monsters in the U.S. decreases, this kid could be a real star. Johnny B. Badd scared me when he started in WCW. I thought he was going to be another green gimmick wrestler. He turned out to be the biggest surprise of the year as he seems to work hard to improve and always seems to try to have a good match.

IAN GOODWIN: Johnny B. Badd and Lightning Kid. Badd plays his gimmick better than anyone and will soon be a very good worker. Though I have not seen him, Lightning Kid gets a vote just based on the reports of his matches. Hey, Jim Ross! Van Hammer does deserve a little recognition, at least for his work with Cactus Jack. Not!

TIM WHITEHEAD: Lightning Kid is the antithesis of the steroid craze, musclebound oaf that typified much of the American wrestling scene today. If the audience could be educated toward the style of wrestling the Kid represents, the action would be hotter and the wrestlers would be healthier.

RYAN JONES: Lightning Kid had some great matches with Jerry Lynn and is improving quite a bit, which is amazing because he is so good already. He shows a lot of promise. Runner up: Jerry Lynn.

RYAN SCHURK: For whatever the reason was, it is good to see Johnny B. Badd on his own. His career was going nowhere with Theodore R. Long.

JOSEPH PERRY: Is there any doubt that it could be anyone besides Johnny B. Badd? Badd started off with a big strike against him in the

Little Richard-in-feathers effeminate act he got stuck with, but he has improved immensely to the point that he was over with fans even before the supposed babyface turns which were rumored to be just around the corner for months. I find it hard to believe that they never traded in



LIGHTNING KID: ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

ability and workrate in such a short time is almost astounding. Add to that a boatload of natural charisma and an entertaining gimmick, and Badd could be a major star in this sport and a great asset for WCW. Strong runner up goes to the Lightning Kid, a phenomenally talented worker and someone that WCW should bring in if they are planning to take this light heavyweight thing seriously.

JAY WEISSMAN: He's so pretty, he should have been born a little girl, but he's a baaaad man - Johnny B. Badd, but not nearly as bad as he once was.

UNKNOWN #2: After all the big build-up, Lightning Kid was a disappointment. My vote is for Johnny B. Badd.

KEVIN VAN DYKE: Curly Mo. He came along just when I was ready to give up on this sport. Col. Mustafa. I don't know where this kid came from, but he's great. Oz, the answer to a hardcore's prayer.

STEVE SIMS: Lightning Kid gets first because he does a more Japanese style and therefore more interesting style of moves. Lynn is very solid and will be a big hit in January in Japan. However, I bet Chaz outlasts them all and will be talked about as a big star within two to three years in WCW.

RHONDA CLARK: Johnny B. Badd. His flamboyance does not take away from his tremendous in-ring skills. Does he have the staying power? Time will tell.

BOB FERRETTI: I have criticized the GWF, but the one thing that I believe they must be given credit for is the well-deserved push of Lightning Kid, who is my first choice. It was great to see him get over using great wrestling and an effective heel schtick instead of having to rely on a steroided up physique or some way-out gimmick which has become standard on the U.S. wrestling scene as a prerequisite for success. Johnny B. Badd and Jerry Lynn are runners up.

TIM DAVIS: Van Hammer? Lightning Kid all the way.

VINNIE CAROLAN: This is hard to choose. Lightning Kid is a great worker, but has no color. Johnny B. Badd has great color and charisma, but he's not a good worker like Kid is. I will have them as a tie for first and second.

JEFF COHEN: Johnny B. Badd did spectacularly well considering the push he was given and the role he had to play. Plaudits all around. Runner up: Lightning Kid.

UNKNOWN #1: Lightning Kid, Johnny B. Badd, and Van Hammer. Even though he's tiny, and you expect him to get sympathy, Kid still got himself over as the leading heel in Global.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: Lightning Kid, Chaz, and Jerry Lynn. Given a few more years to develop his heel persona, Lightning Kid could be the next Dynamite Kid. Despite all of Global's problems, they helped produce the three best rookies in 1991 - the Kid, Chaz, and Lynn.

JOSEPH MARGOSIAN: Jerry Lynn and Lightning Kid. It is encouraging to see someone of Kid's physical stature receive a push. Let us hope this trend continues. Johnny B. Badd gets third. He started out great with an old gimmick, but since then he has allowed the "three stooges" of WCW to turn him into a buffoon. Please, don't over do it.

JEFF BENSON: Johnny B. Badd. I didn't go for the gimmick as quickly as everybody else and I am still not crazy about it, but that guy has picked up a lot quicker in an atmosphere where learning and working hard is not encouraged. He

will definitely be a top flight worker someday.

MARIE DALZELL: Lightning Kid. I have only seen his matches in Global, but from what I have seen, he has a bright future in wrestling. The thing I like best about him is his cocky attitude.

ROB CONTICELLO: Lightning Kid. The most entertaining wrestler in the GWF and one of the biggest risk takers in wrestling. Even his squash matches were fun to watch.

STEVE FISCHER: The Lightning Kid is not only a great wrestler, he is truly one of a kind. He packs his unique heel personality and his great ability into a 180-pound frame. He may never make it in one of the major promotions, but in Global, independents, and now Japan, the Kid should excite crowds for years to come.

DAN MACOSKO: Lightning Kid, Johnny

B. Badd, and Van Hammer. Hammer has improved since working with Cactus, plus I like the gimmick since I'm into metal.



JONNIE B. BADD (#2 Rookie of the Year)

the you know whats of Lightning Kid, Debbie Malenko, and Johnny B. Badd, let alone be carried to a decent match. Only Cactus Jack knows how.

MARK COALE: Lightning Kid, Jerry Lynn, and Johnny B. Badd. Rookie of the year voting is always difficult because true rookies either wrestle independents, are jobbers for the big two, or are muscle-bound roided-up stiff who don't deserve it. Two of the three people on this list really defy that list. I am very happy that

both the Kid and Lynn got attention in Global, otherwise I might never have seen them. Badd is really not only a good rookie, but after only a couple of months, he could be a contender for most improved.

GENE HOLMAN: Lightning Kid all the way. No one I saw came close this year.

PAUL HANLIN JR.: Sorry Jim Ross, but no matter how much you shill for Van Hammer, he could not carry

ANTHONY SCALA: Johnny B. Badd has shown a style well above average for his rookie year. Beneath the gimmick, he's got talent. Lightning Kid and Jerry Lynn are the runners up.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Lightning Kid gets this easily. He may have set a trend in this country that will encourage others who are not gifted genetically to look like Rick Rude or Rick Steiner, but are gifted athletically to get into this sport. Heaven knows this business needs more rookies who entered wrestling because they want to be good wrestlers, not because they want to be good looking statues. Kid will be around for years to come. At 19, next year at this time Kid still will not be able to legally buy a beer in most states. Johnny B. Badd improved while saddled with a gimmick that he could have rested on. Jerry Lynn gets third for similar reasons as Kid. Lynn suffered from an injured ankle for the last few months of 1991, so he was slowed. When he is healthy again, look for his rookie card to grow quickly in value.

PROMOTION OF THE YEAR

This is a more personal choice than other awards in that it should be the promotion that did the most of what you think a wrestling promotion should do, such as make a profit, or put on good matches, or put on realistic matches, or put together the most violent matches, or featured the best mix or angles and interviews, or being the most innovative, or any combination of the above or other.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: The company that lied the least, made the fewest stupid promotional mistakes, had the least number of horrible matches, and stayed off the arrest logs of the various municipalities had their best year in a decade. Congratulations to the *Torch* homeboy, Verne Gagne and the AWA. Whaddaya mean they're out of business?

CHRIS ZAVISA: TWA followed only by WCW. I loved the controlled anarchy that reigned supreme at Joel Goodhart's shows. Somebody should have bottled it and spread it around to the other promotions. I have never been disappointed by one of the TWA's cards.

MARK MADDEN: Smokey Mountain Wrestling. All others tied for last. The few TV shows Jim Cornette's Smokey Mountain Wrestling taped were far and away above any shows done by the WWF, WCW, and the GWF. If Rocky, er, Smokey Mountain can last, it will provide hardcores with some of the best tapes we have seen since Eddie Gilbert's CWF a few years ago. And since I have enjoyed watching Smokey Mountain most, it must have been the promotion of 1991.

ERIC KROL: No promotion deserves this award. Between Titan's tasteless Iraqi angle and WCW's mismanagement, this year was void of a good promotion in the U.S. If I have to vote, I will go with Titan because they entertained me with the Ultimate Warrior and Jake Roberts stuff.

READER COMMENTS

LENNY SKOROS: TWA is first because it had the most violent and exciting matches of the year. WCW is second for showing signs of life. WWF probably shouldn't be third because they misused Ric Flair.

DAN FARREN: No choice. In the United States, there was no promotion of the year.

MATT CREAMER: TWA. Anything is better than the lie-about-everything, shoot-up-or-shut-up WWF or the totally mismanaged WCW.

MIKE O'BRIEN: WCW, WWF, GWF. There wasn't a promotion in the U.S. that really deserves this award. The top two Japanese groups both blew away all promotions in the U.S. Both top U.S. promotions blew

1) WWF (33%)

2) WCW (31%)

3) TWA (15%)

4) GWF (14%)

5) USWA (6%)

6-10) Portland Pro, PWA, SAPW, IWCCW, UWF.

PAST WINNERS

1990: WCW, USWA, WWF

1989: NWA, WWF, Portland

1988: WWF, NWA, CWA (Memphis)

opportunities to make their year more profitable. I sometimes wonder from where they get their booking ideas. I have to pick WCW by default even though management allowed wrestlers such as Ric Flair to depart and Dusty Rhodes's screwjob gimmick booking all year, they still provided the best in-ring action in the U.S. They had a good year for the most part minus the summer months. The WWF really blew their opportunity with Flair and all major shows were disappointments.

ANDY STOWELL: WWF followed by TWA. McMahon really

made stuff happen this year. They lost a lot of deadweight, reinvented some of their older talent (making them even fresher), and had two key arrivals in Sid Justice and Ric Flair. In addition, they put on hot house shows, fantastic TV shows, and ran angles that kept you up at night. Best effort ever by Titan sports.

IAN GOODWIN: They fired the best wrestler of the past ten years. They hired several green, no-talent stiffs. They ripped off their most loyal fans. Their booking often made no sense. They lost tons of money. However, in my opinion, WCW still provided eleven four star-plus matches on their big shows and four good pay-per-views. Besides, any promotion that employed Cactus Jack, Rick Rude, Abdullah the Butcher, Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, Terry Taylor, Steve Austin, Brian Pillman, Rick Steamboat, and Barry Windham can't be 100 percent all bad.

EDDIE GOLDMAN: TWA followed by GWF. The big two don't even merit a show finish. Maybe next year for WCW, but not after what Jim Herd and company pulled on McMahon's steroid circus.

PAUL S.: None! Outside of the few solid angles, the WWF is just a cartoon. They waste most of their people. WCW is too up and down. GWF is a big disappointment. I don't get to see the USWA and Portland, so I can't comment on them. McMahon and Turner should be subsidizing Portland and other one-time territories, not try to crush them. The territories made wrestling what it was.

TIM WHITEHEAD: WWF. There really aren't any truly great promotions left in the U.S., but the WWF is the best of the bunch. USWA is

pretty good, but it lacks the national exposure to draw top talent. GWF has some potential, but it is still too new to be great. And WCW sucked most of the year.

RYAN SCHURK: WCW. Jim Herd finally realizes what it takes to compete with the WWF. While the WWF offices create matches which have the potential to be successful, such as Jake Roberts vs. Ultimate Warrior, they actually turn out to be boring. WCW, on the other hand, creates good matches, such as Sting vs.

Rick Rude, and makes them work.

JOSEPH PERRY: After the much anticipated arrival of Flair, the WWF showed that they are just as terrible as ever. WCW stunk up the place for a great while, but it still offered a more interesting overall product than Titan. So it is WCW by virtue of their late '91 product. Of the indies, I will cast a vote for Portland Pro Wrestling and call this category a tie.

JIM MURPHY: I don't think any U.S. promotion deserves this, but based on recent turns of events and because they were the only U.S. promotion to plan to feature Jushin Liger on TV this year, I have to give it to WCW with the stipulation that they keep going in the direction they seem to have started in.

DAVE PRAZAK: While I dislike Vince McMahon, I will say that the WWF was the best promotion in 1991. The WWF put on a spectacular Royal Rumble, a so-called Wrestlemania with only a good Randy Savage vs. Ultimate Warrior match to speak for it, and a good SummerSlam. The WWF brought in Ricky Steamboat, Owen Hart, and Ric Flair. I believe McMahon handled the Flair situation great, bringing the NWA belt with him, doing a great angle with Piper where McMahon took a bump,

and making Flair vs. Hogan possible. The WWF put out good matches, good shows, and the best angles in 1991 and deserves the honor of promotion of the year. Second place goes to Global. Beginning in the middle of 1991, it sparked into the world of pro wrestling with competitors such as Patriot, Lightning Kid, and Cactus Jack. A new federation that turned out great. Third place goes to WCW. They are the next best organization in the U.S. right now. They simply did not improve over the last year and just brought in people with dumber images.

KENNY VAUGHN: WCW first because there's still hope. Global second because it looked good for a time. WWF third, just because it's there.

UNKNOWN #2: WCW. The middle months were terrible, but it started hot and ended hot with the additions of Rick Rude and Rick Steamboat.

KEVIN VAN DYKE: IWCCW. They came up with Curly Mo and Boss Hogg in the same year. 'Nuff said. Second goes to the GWF. Who would have thought \$25 million could go so far. Memphis' USWA gets third. They've taken all the bad WWF gimmicks and honed them to perfection.

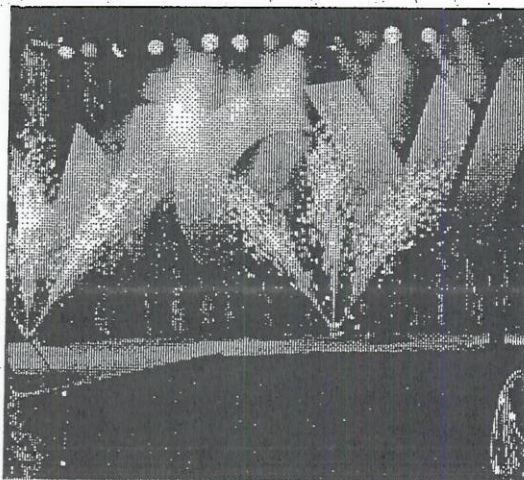
RHONDA CLARK: WCW. They bounced back from the loss of Flair and brought in Steve Austin, Johnny B. Badd, P.N. News, and occupying the fans' time with Sting boxes and Cactus Jack's entrance. USWA gets second which kept my interest all year, including a solid year from Jeff Jarrett & Robert Fuller.

BOB FERRETTI: Although WCW has shown some signs of waking up lately, they were a disgrace during much of the year. The USWA and Global try but don't have the resources to realistically compete, although the USWA's Memphis studio show on WMC had some good moments. I refuse to vote for a promotion that exploits a war. So I guess I will go with WCW with the USWA and GWF runners up.

TIM DAVIS: TWA, the only organization with real shows and matches.



WWF'S SUMMERSLAM: THE WEDDING



WCW: RUNWAY TO THE RING

DAN LENNARD: WWF, WCW, and Global. When it all boils down to the nitty gritty, the best promotion is the one that makes the most money. Which means you have to give this award to the WWF. But, gee, it leaves a bad taste in my mouth to do it.

GREG BERRYHILL: WWF. Live events are much more organized than WCW, plus the WWF got Flair to jump with a little help from Jim Herd.

MARIE DALZELL: Global. Even though they have been running repeat shows, their vast array of talent more than makes up for it.

RON CONTICELLO: TWA. I never felt cheated after going to one of their cards, and that is more than I can say about any of the major organizations. GWF. Their television shows were better than the WWF and WCW for their first months. WWF and WCW tie for third. When the WWF was doing good, the WWF was bad; and when WCW has been good, the WWF has been lousy, so they share a spot.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: WCW. Despite their constant Jekyll and Hyde track record in '91 and things that have been covered in this newsletter ad nauseum, WCW did give us WrestleWar, the best pay-per-view of the year; SuperBrawl, Starrcade at the Tokyo Dome, and the November Clash, probably the best Clash they have given us since NY Knockout in Nov. '89. When they were on, they were awesome.

GENE HOLMAN: Before Survivor Series I would have said the WWF, on the strength of

Flair coming in with his persona intact, and for the impending showdown with Hulk Hogan. Now I cannot come up with a single one. I wonder what that says about 1991?

PAUL HANLIN JR.: Let's see... WWF: But they do little things like exploit wars for PPV consumption, have more roidheads per square mile than any group on earth (Except the World Bodybuilding Federation, of course) and feature the Torched Turkey of 1991. Not now; not ever. WCW: Maybe next year, but not for 1991 and I don't even have to waste the space to explain why. USWA: A shell of what it once was and they blew it big-time with the Lawler-Luger-Gilbert-Dangerously-Herd farce. TWA is the best independent I have seen in five years, but it relies too much on bloodfests. Global: Maybe, but their guys have pretty much nowhere else to go. Plus they had Rasta the Voo Doo Mon. Check out Japanese Promotion of the Year. No U.S. group qualifies.

MARK COALE: GWF, WCW, and WWF. I give Global much credit for trying something a little different; though their lack of funds and new talent will definitely hurt them in the end. It's really a toss-up for the other two, but I have a psychological block against putting the WWF ahead of WCW.

ANTHONY SCALA: It's got to be the WWF. Although they did not put on great wrestling matches, you can't knock success. They stand above a distant but solid second place WCW. WCW was about as close to folding as they ever were just a few months back, but it now seems that they'll give the WWF a run for their

money. Acquiring Steamboat and Rude, and putting on great bouts that feature wrestling is a big step back towards the top. Third place goes to the GWF.

JIMMY MARSHALL: WWF, Global, and WCW. The WWF had the worst three pay-per-views of the year in Wrestlemania, SummerSlam, and the Survivor Series, but they always made money. Their TV coverage and merchandising efforts are very impressive and profitable.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: WCW gets it based on the first few months and last few months of 1991. The middle six months were dreadful, nearly self-destructing to the point that the WWF had a monopoly. The WWF does not get first because the gross number of good matches came no where close to WCW and WCW did not exploit a war to make money. The WWF does get second because they still were best at so many things, including professional looking TV shows which is 80 percent of the game. Global gets third for taking some chances on young talent and getting started in the first place, something that some believed might never take place. With a little more creativity, consistency, and vision, the GWF could have been the promotion of the year. Instead they spent a lot of time learning that Rasta the Voo Doo Mon and outrageous statements about internationalism hurt their credibility. If booker Eddie Gilbert does not go to WCW or the WWF, the GWF could grow into a strong contender for this honor next year. Honorable mention to the TWA for some great match-making, especially Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best manager of the year. Paul E. Dangerously is eligible for both this category and the color commentator category. The winner the past three years was Jim Cornette.

- 1) PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY (25%)
- 2) SENSATIONAL SHERRI (23%)
- 3) PAUL BEARER (17%)
- 4) BOBBY HEENAN (16%)
- 5) JIM CORNETTE (8%)
- 6-10) Teddy Long, Madusa, Harley Race, Chris Love, Tony Rumble.

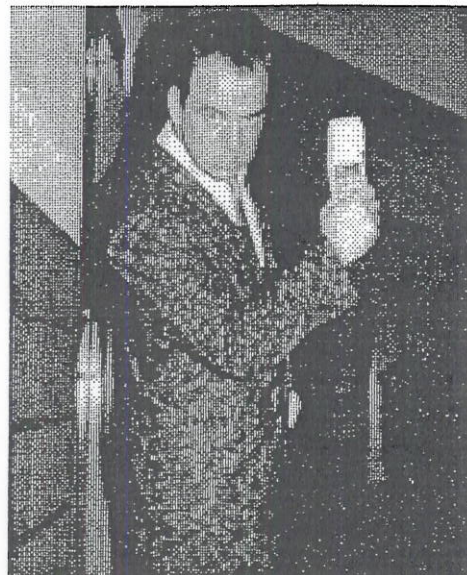
PAST WINNERS

1990: Cornette, Heenan, and Sensational Sherri
1989: Cornette, Heenan, Dangerously
1988: Cornette, Dangerously, Heenan

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Paul E. Dangerously, Teddy Long, and Bobby Heenan. Heenan's work with Ric Flair was excellent, but two months do not a year make. Dangerously was the best of the bunch and his mic work after his firing and return was the best of his career. The Dangerous Alliance routine seems to have worked well for him. It is a bit like watching the Four Horsemen if James Cornette had managed them instead of the staid J.J. Dillon.

ERIC KROL: Paul E. Dangerously. I don't care if he only managed for two months. His shoot style interviews are the greatest. Whether or not the entire firing thing was a work, he is the best manager of the best group of heels today. Besides, with Cornette disappearing, who else is there? Second goes to Heenan because he "managed" Flair, even if he did do a lackluster job at it.



PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY

MARK MADDEN: Jim Cornette, Paul E. Dangerously, and Sensational Sherri. Cornette packed more solid managing into his indie, GWF, and Smokey Mountain appearances than the rest of the bunch (Dangerously, a strong second, excepted) did over the entire year.

BRUCE MITCHELL: A truly lousy year for this category, also. Bobby Heenan wins for his part time work introducing the "Real World Champion". That first interview at the end of "Wrestling Challenge" won it for him by itself. Paul E. Dangerously takes second for his barely veiled truthful blasts at the WCW board. He still spends too much time promoting himself and not his wrestlers, however.

READER COMMENTS

LENNY SKOROS: Paul E. Dangerously gets first because he was the most visible. You can't go wrong with his stable. He definitely added excitement to WCW. Jim Cornette gets second because he is still the best, but not in the public eye as much. Bobby Heenan gets third.

ELYSE ZOIS: Paul Bearer is hysterically funny and makes up for the fact that Undertaker has the personality of a turnip.

MATT CREAMER: All it took was one month that Paul E. didn't have to act like a buffoon to become the top manager in wrestling. Let him act with a little dignity and give him some leeway on interviews, and you have got a very effective heel persona. I'm glad he's back. Otherwise I would have to vote for Paul Bearer solely on facial expressions. Third goes to Sensational Sherri.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Sensational Sherri, Jim Cornette, and Paul E. Dangerously. There was not a manager in a major group that had an impact all year except Sensational Sherri. She plays her character perfectly and usually works harder than any wrestler on the card she appears on. Jim Cornette was great in his limited work, but he did not work enough to get first. Dangerously, if he continues, will be a shoe in for this award in 1992.

ANDY STOWELL: Sensational Sherri. Runner-up: Paul Bearer. Bearer has a great gimmick, a hot wrestler, and five minutes of TV to get himself over every week, but nobody is as important as Sherri. I saw a match in Pittsburgh last March with Slaughter wrestling the Warrior and Sherri alone raised the match two stars. She works crowds better than anyone, including Jim Cornette! She also inspires more sheer hatred than other managers and looks a hell of a lot better in a short skirt than Elizabeth does.

IAN GOODWIN: Paul Bearer, Bobby

Heenan, and Paul E. Dangerously. Bearer was the only manager who stood out all year. His act was unique and hilarious. When he was there, Heenan was great. He was not working long enough to receive a first place vote, but Dangerously does deserve some recognition. I'm sure he will win unanimously next year.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Paul Bearer. Sure, Bearer overacts, but no other manager-wrestler combination comes close to drawing the heel heat that Bearer and Undertaker draw. This duo is over bigtime.

RYAN JONES: Sensational Sherri added so much heat to Savage's and DiBiase's matches. Runners-up: Paul E. Dangerously and Paul Bearer.

STUART BRYNIEN: Paul Bearer. No one takes it to the limit like Bearer. His make-up alone puts him over the top. A brilliant character brilliantly played. Sensational Sherri gets second, although it was close. If Bearer's character was not so original, Sherri would have won, hands down. No one, including old pasty face, works harder at ringside than Sherri. Both before she abdicated her throne as the Macho Man's queen and afterwards.

JOSEPH PERRY: Sensational Sherri is one of the only reasons to go see the WWF live, not that that's reason enough to walk across the street to see a Titan concession salesfest. But she consistently puts on a terrific show, yelling, screaming, getting stripped, running around and through the ring like a woman possessed. Dangerously is far better on interviews, but he doesn't work the ring like the Sensational one.

JIM MURPHY: Two months ago, I would not have voted in this category. Now, Paul E. Dangerously is the clear choice. He is a major player in the revitalization of WCW. His interview at Halloween Havoc was an all-time great, and the new Dangerous Alliance could be the reincarnation of the Horsemen.

JAY WEISSMAN: Paul Bearer was given the responsibility of getting the top heel over, which he did.

KENNY VAUGHN: Paul Bearer is hilarious, unbelievably done. Paul E. Dangerously wins on the basis of one interview.

STEVE SIMS: Paul Bearer, Paul E. Dangerously, and Sensational Sherri. I would have voted Sherri higher, but I thought her role was disgusting.

VINNIE CAROLAN: Besides Sensational Sherri, no one deserves it besides Paul Bearer. He is part of the reason Undertaker is over today. Without him, would Undertaker still be accepted as a top draw? I doubt it. Sherri gets second since her work is just stupendous, although her interviews are more annoying than the Ultimate Warrior. Third goes to Cornette for his work in the LPWA and Global, plus his interviews are always above par.

JEFF COHEN: Sensational Sherri, Paul E. Dangerously, and Bobby Heenan. Sherri was given two of the top workers in the U.S. With her persona and charisma, she was able to get over like no male heel in the Fed.

DAN LENNARD: Bobby Heenan, Sensational Sherri, and Paul E. Dangerously. Dangerously started too late in the year to earn this award. While Sherri was very good in 1991, particularly with Savage, I give my award to Heenan for his incredible mic work when Ric Flair first entered the WWF.

JOSEPH MARGOSIAN: Bobby Heenan, Jim Cornette, and Paul E. Dangerously. Where is the "Fashion Plate" Freddie Blassie when you really need him.

STEVE FISCHER: Paul Bearer should get this award for his facial expressions alone. Not only is he a good entertainer and fun to watch, but he compliments the Undertaker's low solemn style perfectly.



SENSATIONAL SHERRI (#2)

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Sensational Sherri works her butt off, literally, every night. If Paul E. Dangerously had one more month in managing this year, I would have given him first place. The Dangerous Alliance angle has really gotten him motivated. I have not seen him look this convincing since the feud between the Expresses a few years back. Paul Bearer gets third.

GENE HOLMAN: Paul E. Dangerously. I always thought he was a better manager than he was an announcer, but his return to the ring in late 1991 rivals his classic 1987 run in Memphis.

PAUL HANLIN JR.: If Paul E. Dangerously were let loose with the Dangerous Alliance in early 1991 instead of the last week of October, he would make this a horse race. No one, though, can touch Paul Bearer. To say he was incredible would be to damn him with faint praise. Sensational Sherri's importance to the WWF cannot be under-emphasized. Just pop in

a tape of Slaughter's title win over Ultimate Warrior at the Royal Rumble. Dangerously can do no better than third.

MARK COALE: Paul E. Dangerously, Jim Cornette, and Sensational Sherri. Since James E. Cornette has only made token appearances, I really feel guilty about putting him on this list. But, my love of his schtick makes him a permanent member of this list. Dangerously's new manager status in WCW, coupled with his semi-shoot interviews make him the winner. Sherri's act does not seem as good or exciting with DiBiase, but she saved many, many matches during the first half of the year.

FINAL COMMENTS by Wade Keller: Sensational Sherri did what a manager should do: get heat at ringside, make bad matches watchable and good matches better. On interviews, she effectively convinced people that she was devious. Second place goes to Paul E. Dangerously for the latter part of the year and his



PAUL BEARER (#3)

return interview after being fired. Third goes to Bobby Heenan for his work getting Ric Flair over to WWF fans before Flair ever showed up on TV.

ANNOUNCER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the announcer you believe did the best job this year as announcer. Color commentators who did no play-by-play are not eligible for this award.

- 1) JIM ROSS (50%)
- 2) TONY SCHIAVONE (27%)
- 3) VINCE MCMAHON (13%)
- 4) CRAIG JOHNSON (7%)
- 5) GORILLA MONSOON (3%)
- 6-10) Joe Pedicino, Bob Caudle, Dave Brown, Lord Alfred Hayes, Michael St. John,

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Jim Ross, Tony Schiavone, Vince McMahon

1989: Jim Ross, Tony Schiavone, Lance Russell

1988: Jim Ross, Jesse Ventura, Lance Russell (color commentary was inclusive in this category)

COLUMNISTS COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: The bloom may be off the Ross, I mean the rose, but Spanky is still the most talented man in his field. Tony Schiavone is second. Third is the stunner. Global's Scott Hudson revived the lost art of playing the straight man. I always thought if a newsletter guy got a chance to work in the field he would stink on ice due to sheer arrogance.

Hudson is a very pleasant surprise.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Jim Ross. The only American announcer who is in the same category of excellence as Japan's Akira Fukuzawa or Mexico's Alfonso Morales is Jim Ross. He makes good matches better with his knowledge of sports and athletics. Okay, so every aerial move Jushin Liger does is not really a Shooting Star Press. Ross makes mistakes - we all do - but he still is the only first-quality announcer this nation has right now.

ERIC KROL: This is another category where no one is really deserving. I can't in good conscience blindly hand this to Ross, because his overcommercialization had me on the edge of my seat - the toilet seat, that is. Sorry, Jimbo, I know you don't like to be criticized in the sheets, but Ray Charles could see you were too busy getting your Johnny Carson-like ego over and selling your "cottage industries" during the greater part of the year. Vince McMahon may be an articulate speaker, but blatantly lying to the public and belittling Flair as a minor leaguer was not the way to get Flair over to your audience. As a result, I will take Tony Schiavone. He may not be spectacular, but he gets the job done. And in this, the year of wrestling wasteland, the average look all the better.

MARK MADDEN: Vince McMahon, Tony Schiavone, and Jim Ross. Say what you will about anything else he does, but McMahon is a first-rate TV announcer with the ability to inject emotion into any situation without making

it sound too schmaltzy. It is his organization's insistence on injections of other kinds that bother me. Schiavone second because he's professional and does not sound like a hick. Jim Ross gets third because he's professional and does.

READER COMMENTS

MIKE O'BRIEN: Jim Ross was once again the best of the bunch. There is not an announcer who can touch Jim Ross's legit announcing when he is on during the big match. His only problem is that this year he was preoccupied with selling himself on TV too often and also making pro-WCW b.s. comments such as, "If Van Hammer isn't voted rookie of the year, they shouldn't even have the award."

ROSS LAIDLAW: There is no one better than Jim Ross behind the mic. Eloquent and insightful.

JOSEPH PERRY: I really don't understand all the anti-Jim Ross sentiment this year. Who is a better alternative?

KEVIN VAN DYKE: Sean Mooney. With Sean doing the call, it's not just a match, it's an encounter.

STEVE SIMS: Vince McMahon, Jim Ross, and Craig Johnson. I still believe Vince is the best at getting over the angles the way they should be. Ross is better in big matches, but pushes himself too much. Johnson seems very solid and confident, but not at the level of the big



BOB CAUDLE (#7)

two.

RHONDA CLARK: Jim Ross. Sometimes he can be annoying and repetitive, but he is one of the best in the business.

VINNIE CAROLAN: The Jim Ross award goes to... the envelope please! Mr. Jim Ross. What a surprise. Who else should get the top draw? Second goes to Tony Schiavone since he is credible and tries to get the wrestling matches over instead of himself. Third goes to Craig Johnson since he does a good job with Global, but not many people take note of that.

JEFF COHEN: Jim Ross, Tony Schiavone, and Vince McMahon. I will take Ross over McMahon any day. For announcing, not booking, that is.

DAN LENNARD: Jim Ross was a pain in the butt at times during 1991, but you cannot deny he is still the best announcer in the business when he's not trying to sell himself. Vince McMahon does what he has to do well to sell his merchandise. The pleasant surprise in 1991 was to hear the enthusiastic work done by Global's Craig Johnson.

JOSEPH MARGOSIAN: Jim Ross. This year he is facing more detractors than ever before, but we must realize that he is doing the job that he is paid to do. And yet, albeit under



TONY SCHIAVONE (#2)

WCW supervision, he attempts to be as truthful and realistic as possible and promotes credibility for the sport. He is the very best announcer in the business today, and perhaps ever. To all of his detractors let me ask this question: Would you prefer someone else in his position? If you want as we all do to sell pro wrestling, then Jim Ross is your man.

MARIE DALZEL: Tony Schiavone. He usually tells it like it is, and rarely seems to take sides.

ROB CONTICELLO: Jim Ross. Best of another weak area. I am getting tired of all these "physically intense matches" but he can do really good play-by-play and straight interviews. Tony Schiavone gets second. I enjoyed his pairing with Jim Ross at pay-per-views. They made wrestling the focus, not their individual personalities. Vince McMahon. He can be really suspenseful, but I don't care for him too much otherwise.

STEVE FISCHER: Jim Ross should win this award once again and this year he actually had some good matches to call. Although he often makes himself the center of attention, rather than the wrestlers, his blend of knowledge and enthusiasm makes him the best in the business.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Jim Ross is still the best, but I lost a lot of respect for him this year as he shilled for every stiff in WCW, knocked Flair repeatedly after his departure, and tried to make us believe that Luger had no parallel while claiming Hammer should get rookie of the year. That is not the Jim Ross I have come to admire.

PAUL HANLIN: For the best on these shores, you head south.

MARK COALE: Jim Ross is still the best, though he has become an almost shameless shill for WCW. Schiavone only gets on the list cuz everyone else is so lame.

MATT CREAMER: Jim Ross, solely for his pay-per-view work. From what I have heard, he blows everyone else away. Even if he had competition, Ross would still be on top.

ANDY STOWELL: Vince McMahon and Scott Hudson. The only bad thing you can say about McMahon is that he lets Gorilla call the pay-per-views. His work with Piper and Savage was the absolute best TV in a long time. Plus, he had the courtesy to do a job for Ric Flair, unlike certain WCW minor league powder puff champions.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Jim Ross. I vote for Jim Ross with reservations due to some of his

inane comments during the latter half of the year. Van Hammer for rookie of the year?!! As Gorilla Monsoon would say, for the 15,673rd time, "Give me a break!"



JIM ROSS: ANNOUNCER OF THE YEAR

RYAN SCHURK: Jim Ross. The enthusiasm he shows in his commentary makes every match exciting to watch. His interview with Sting a few weeks ago on WCW was nothing less than outstanding. His interviews with Sting are as good as those between Mean Gene Okerlund and Hulk Hogan.

UNKNOWN #3: Vince McMahon. Give the devil his due. Has Jim Ross "deproved" that much or did he just used to sound good in comparison to Bob Caudle?

JIM MURPHY: Jim Ross, by default primarily. His recent performance during the seeming rebirth of WCW has been very impressive, however.

DAVE FREY: Lord Alfred Hayes. This is the only face announcer (he is a face announcer, isn't he?) who gives some respect to the heels. He did a really good job on Prime Time also. Jim Ross is the most deproved announcer in history. His constant shilling for his 900 number along with the snide comments about workers who have now left WCW makes me sick. His role in the Paul E. Dangerously, Jerry Lawler, Eddie Gilbert situation should disqualify him from consideration.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

There are two kinds of announcers today in pro wrestling. First, there is Jim Ross, who no one can touch during a match of the year candidate. When the action is heated and there is a history to the match, Ross prepares better than anyone else, respects his audience better than anyone else, and if he is guilty of anything it is getting too excited. The second kind of announcer is the

kind that is good at calling a boring match. Ross is terrible at that. He either oversells it or falls asleep. Gorilla Monsoon, however, along with Bobby Heenan is tremendous in bad matches because rarely does he actually call a match. I cannot remember the last time Monsoon actually called the action in a match. Vince McMahon, Lord Alfred Hayes, and Sean Mooney have had plenty of practice at the art of talking about

everything but the match in the ring. Vince McMahon gets second place, because while he is versatile in both areas of announcing, and much better than Ross at calling a boring match, he shows little respect for the audience in that he rarely provides any background and is often condescending. He, is, however, an excellent commentator when a match is good as far as counting close falls as if they could be the end of

the match. Tony Schiavone gets third place for a rather uninspired year. Schiavone's inconsistency puts him in the category of Randy Savage in that he has all the potential to be a lot better than he is but rarely finds reason to do so. Now that he will be joined by Jesse Ventura on World Wide, look for a strong challenge from him for the number one position in this category next year.

COLOR COMMENTATOR OF THE YEAR

This award goes to either full-time color commentators or wrestlers and managers who also color commentate.

1) BOBBY HEENAN

(34%)

2) PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY

(19%)

3) SCOTTY "THE BODY"

ANTHONY (14%)

4) RODDY PIPER (8%)

5) SCOTT HUDSON (6%)

6-10) Jim Cornette, "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig, Larry Zbyszko, Randy Savage, Tony Schiavone.

PAST WINNERS

1990: Jesse Ventura, Paul E. Dangerously, Roddy Piper.

1991: Jesse Ventura, Jim Cornette, Michael Hayes.

calling matches in that sing song voice, quit laughing at the heels so that nobody takes them seriously, quit yelling all the time, quit towering over the wrestlers like some greased down Frankenstein... Basically, he ought to just quit.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Bobby Heenan and Paul E. Dangerously. Despite nearly a decade of overexposure, Heenan still is enjoyable and occasionally, extremely entertaining. They let him get away with a lot of more on Prime Time and Heenan does well with the expanded freedom. Dangerously was darn good on the color mic, but since his return as a manager, his work there has been nearly non-existent.

READER COMMENTS

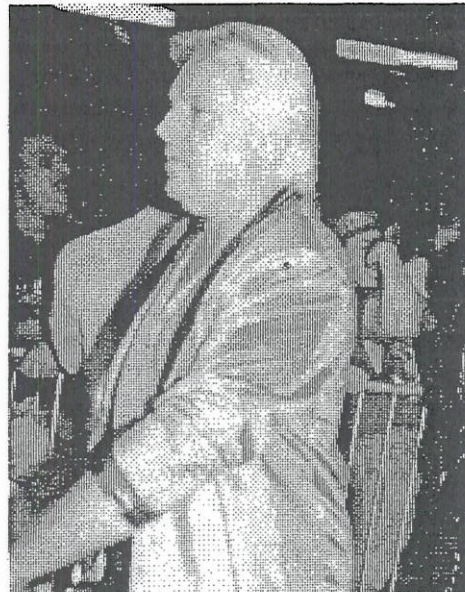
DAVE PRAZAK: Bobby Heenan is hilarious as a color commentator and does a great job. Roddy Piper gets second because he is very creative and likeable behind the mic. Third place goes to Scott Hudson, who did a better job behind the mic than the annoying Craig Johnson and Joe Pedicino in Global.

JIM MURPHY: Paul E. Dangerously again this year. I would have given it to Scott Anthony based on the few times I have heard him in the GWF, but Dangerously's stock has risen since Havoc, so he gets the nod.

RUSS LAIDLAW: Bobby Heenan is a smart alack, but he keeps a match interesting. Scott Anthony has had some great quotes on GWF shows. He is quite entertaining. Third, Roddy Piper.

RYAN SCHURK: Bobby Heenan. His constant on-the-air wisecracks make him a joy to listen to, considering the kind of guy he is made out to be.

STUART BRYNIEN: Bobby Heenan. Except for his obnoxious work on Survivor Series, the Brain was a genuinely funny guy to listen to and probably will be for the rest of his broadcast career. He gets all the lines, and he knows what to do with them; his sense of timing is almost always right on target. Paul E. Dangerously gets second. Another witty mind



BOBBY HEENAN:
COLOR COMMENTATOR OF THE YEAR

and sharp tongue serving as the perfect foil for his strait-laced partner. I did not like everything he said behind the mic, but that is only because he takes so many chances. It is almost too bad he has gone back to managing. Tony Schiavone is third. Totally unlike Heenan and Dangerously, but effective in his own way. Provides information and keeps his viewers on top of the "story" behind a match without injecting himself into the proceedings. A real pro.

RYAN JONES: Curt Hennig. He was fun to listen to, almost like Jesse Ventura, but not quite.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Roddy Piper's not as good as Jesse Ventura, but he's still good.

IAN GOODWIN: While Jesse Ventura was absent from the airwaves and Paul E. Dangerously seems to have lost his mind and skills, only Bobby Heenan continued to shine. That is why he deserves the Jesse Ventura award.

MATT CREAMER: Larry Zbyszko, Scott Anthony, and Bobby Heenan. It is a shame more people did not get to hear Zbyszko this year. His was a perfect blend of cynicism, wise-ass

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

ERIC KROL: Paul E. Dangerously, the nice little Jewish boy from Scarsdale, gets the duke, if only because no one else commentated the whole year. Scott Hudson gets second. I would love to see more of him (on the air, that is).

MARK MADDEN: Scott Anthony, Jim Cornette, and Bobby Heenan. Close one between Scotty on GWF and Corny on LPWA, so I flipped a coin. But what's the difference, nobody watched either show. Someone get Scotty a real job, quick!

BRUCE MITCHELL: Scott Hudson had the most good lines and was the most professional except, when he overdid it with those ridiculous claims about Global. Sorry, but any promotion that employs Gary Young probably ain't based out of Barcelona, Spain. I want to take this opportunity to say that his partner, Craig "Smirk" Johnson ought to quit

sarcasm, wry humor, and actual wrestling insight. He bitched, he moaned, and he was interesting even when WCW wasn't.

ANTHONY SCALA: No question about it, Bobby Heenan wins it hands down. Heenan adds brilliance to the show. Whether he and Monsoon are battling it out, or he is making a fool of himself, he is the best on TV today. Paul E. Dangerously and Randy Savage are runners-up.

MARK COALE: Although Jim Cornette was unseen most of the year, he was heard on Pedicino's LPWA, which is enough for me to vote for him. Dangerously's schtick gets old fast, and since WCW now has one-man booths, this category is kind of scraping. Scott Hudson is frightening because he balances the truth with made-up facts that might fool the fans, such as Billy Black having wins over Jushin Liger.

DAVE FREY: Bobby Heenan. Why won't someone give Mayor Jesse a real job? He is missed.

GENE HOLMAN: Scott Anthony wins because he always manages to crack me up every time I watch him.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Paul E. Dangerously was by far the best. Despite the inane angle with Missy, he matured a lot as an announcer this year and provided a lot more insight during telecasts. Larry Zbyszko was hilarious with Tony Schiavone while doing WCW Chicago together. I would give third to Bobby Heenan. Anybody who can stand working with Monsoon for 52 weeks deserves consideration.

JEFF COHEN: Paul E. Dangerously. Dangerously should never have been taken off the mic. An ego play on Dusty's part which backfired badly and he tried to take it out on Dangerously. Who's sorry now?

VINNIE CAROLAN: It's a toss up this year between Paul E. Dangerously and Scott Anthony. Both are very good at what they do and I guess if lines of the week was the measuring stick for this award, it would be a dead tie. I am going with Dangerously since he was great on some of the WCW programs and seems to never hold back what he wants to say.

BOB FERRETTI: Sometimes the only reason for me to turn on the GWF program was to hear Scott Anthony. Bobby Heenan and Randy Savage are the runners up.

RHONDA CLARK: Bobby Heenan. For years, he was the sports top manager. Now he is the best color man and a great foil for Monsoon and McMahon.

STEVE SIMS: Paul E. Dangerously played off Ross really well, I thought, when each wasn't trying to get himself over. Jim Cornette was funny on the LPWA. Heenan was the best for the first half of the year, but tailed off, especially in November.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: A good case for first could be made for Scott Anthony, Scott Hudson, Paul E. Dangerously, Bobby Heenan, Curt Hennig, and Larry Zbyszko. Without Jese Ventura to walk away with the award this year, a lot of people got chances to shine behind the mic. I will go with Paul E. Dangerously because when he was on, there was no one better or more controversial. Larry Zbyszko gets second. Because he was a wrestler he added insight that most color commentators don't. He also has the humor and biting sarcasm to keep the show funny. Third goes to Scott Anthony because he was the funniest of all in a limited role and showed potential to be a great color commentator in the years to come.

BEST ANNOUNCING PAIR OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the regular tandem who showed skill, accuracy, consistency, wit, and chemistry in 1991.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

ERIC KROL: None deserving. I like Vince McMahon & Roddy Piper & Randy Savage here because the banter was good and they seemed to jell after a while. Piper's semi-shoot remarks about his boss were always appreciated, too. Paul E. Dangerously & Jim Ross & Missy Hyatt were childish, immature, and ego-driven, but I guess that was the point.

BRUCE MITCHELL: If you could stick a pin in your brain and forget reality, Vince McMahon and Randy Savage were pretty funny. Most of these pairs somehow added up to less than the sum of their parts.

MARK MADDEN: Joe Pedicino & Jim Cornette, Craig Johnson & Scott Anthony, and Missy Hyatt. Cornette carried Pedicino so well, I am surprised he did not throw his back out. Remember, Jim, lift heavy weights with your legs. Anthony did the same with Johnson. The cheap sexism behind Missy Hyatt's selection speaks for itself. Ain't it great!

CHRIS ZAVISA: Ross & Schiavone. Who else is there?

READER COMMENTS

DAN LENNARD: Paul E. Dangerously and Jim Ross were sort of like the Abbott and Costello of wrestling announcers.

DAVE PRAZAK: With my all-time favorite team of Ventura & Monsoon broken up, McMahon & Piper are my new favorite team. Second place goes to Ross and Schiavone. Heenan & Monsoon are third.

JOSEPH PERRY: What a mistake it was to break up Jim Ross and Paul E. Dangerously.

RYAN SCHURK: Gorilla Monsoon & Bobby Heenan. The constant bickering between these two is almost as enjoyable as the matches themselves.

STUART BRYNIEN: Bobby Heenan & Gorilla Monsoon, only because of Heenan. Alone, the Gorilla is not much, and all they do is quarrel, but their testy little exchanges are funny. Jim Ross & Paul E. Danerously get second place for the same reasons. Ross & Tony Schiavone, from a reporting point of view, may be the best of the lot. Although not nearly as funny, at least when they're working together, they don't try to

1) JIM ROSS & PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY (32%)

2) GORILLA MONSOON & BOBBY HEENAN (26%)

3) VINCE MCMAHON & RODDY PIPER & RANDY SAVAGE (17%)

4) JIM ROSS & TONY SCHIAVONE (9%)

5) CRAIG JOHNSON & SCOTT HUDSON (6%)

6-10) Schiavone & Zbyszko, Johnson & Anthony, Dave Brown & Michael St. John, Jim Cornette & Joe Pedicino, McMahon & Hennig.

PAST WINNERS

1990: Ross & Dangeorusly, Vince McMahon & Jesse Ventura, Monsoon & Heenan

1989: McMahon & Ventura, Ross & Cornette, Ross & Bob Caudle

be.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously went downhill this year, but they were still the top duo.

PAUL S.: Gorilla Monsoon & Bobby Heenan. Heenan is great whether he is with Monsoon or McMahon or Perfect or whomever. Monsoon sets him up as "the blind fool" really well.

DAVE FREY: Bobby Heenan and Gorilla Monsoon are the classic heel/face pair.

EDDIE GOLDMAN: Joe Pedicino & Jim Cornette first. Craig Johnson & Scott Hudson second. Pedicino & Cornette had a mature, unmatched chemistry that kept viewers in stitches despite uneven action in the ring. Johnson & Hudson also matured as the year went on, dropping some of the more pretentious historical fabrications and settling in to provide enjoyable and often informative coverage.

ANDY STOWELL: Vince McMahon & Roddy Piper & Randy Savage. Except for the show where they all started singing, these three did more to entertain the fans than any other announcers even tried to do.



LARRY ZBYSZKO

MATT CREAMER: Unlike too many other announcing combos trying to outdo each other, Tony Schiavone on WCW Pro Chicago had the sense to stick to the play by play and straight man material and let Larry Zbyszko get off the good lines. They also had some pretty good "on location in Chicago" skits. Craig Johnson & Scott Hudson get second.

ANTHONY SCALA: Gorilla Monsoon & Bobby Heenan. They worked better as a team

this year than they ever did. Monsoon knows what he is talking about, although sometimes he gets carried away with his external poctooberus or whatever that is. They compliment each other



GORILLA MONSOON & BOBBY HEENAN & RODDY PIPER

while making us forget about the sometimes dreadful bouts taking place on TV.

MARK COALE: Announcing was down, so Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously are the best of a slim group. The WWF three-man booth was entertaining, but I think Vince McMahon & Curt Hennig will be easier to tolerate. The Gorilla & Brain shows are better as a latter-day vaudeville act than as commentators, but they are fun at times.

GENE HOLMAN: Jim Ross & Tony Schiavone. I must be in the minority, but I do not think that heel color commentators are absolutely necessary. When they work together, Ross and Schiavone blow everyone else away with a great combination of knowledge, insight, and humor that rarely insults my intelligence.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously were still the best together. You can't help but laugh when the two argue and Ross rolls the eyes in a "What have I done to deserve this" look. Tony Schiavone & Larry Zbyszko are a very close second. Constant bickering and priceless one-liners from the Mayor of Larryland highlighted the first half of the year in Chicago. WCW has had so many great duos in the past and never fail to break them up. So, in the memory of Cruise & Funk, Schiavone & Mantel, and Ross & Cornette, they broke up the top two duos of the year. Make up your mind, guys!

ROB CONTICELLO: Jim Ross & Tony Schiavone. They never get in the way of the action and the heel commentator gimmick is getting a little stale. Vince McMahon & Bobby Heenan get second. Third goes to Craig Johnson & Scott Anthony & Scott Hudson. I love Scott

Anthony's putdowns of Hudson and Johnson.

JEFF COHEN: Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously had some high times on WCW Pro New York this year, getting permission from the front office to "shoot" on Ric Flair.

BOB FERRETTI: I give this to Craig Johnson & Scott Hudson. They at least told some of the truth and did not try to make themselves bigger than the wrestling, which is something I cannot say for Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously and the various Titan announcing teams.

RHONDA CLARK: Bobby Heenan & Gorilla Monsoon. They bring interest to some of the most mundane matches. Their playful ribs at one another make for great viewing. Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously was also a terrific team this year.

STEVE SIMS: Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously. They get first because they had good chemistry and were good at big events, although they put themselves over too much and not the matches or the wrestlers. Craig Johnson & Scott Hudson are solid, but not spectacular. Gorilla Monsoon & Bobby Heenan had a great Royal Rumble and a good first-half of the year. Their Survivor Series effort moved them from first to last.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously had more opportunities on major shows this year than any other team and shined for much of it. At times, their bickering took away from their job - getting the wrestlers over and adding insight to the match - but overall they were the best. Second goes to Tony Schiavone & Larry Zbyszko who had better chemistry than any other announcing team. Zbyszko's wit and Schiavone's ideal straight-man role worked well together. Third place goes to Craig Johnson & Scott Hudson. They tried some new things, such as recalling legitimate background information on wrestlers from both America and Japan. They mixed in very credible announcing with outrageous claims about the GWF's headquarters and background, but overall they were a solid third. Gorilla Monsoon & Bobby Heenan were a good comedy team, but never actually called matches. Vince McMahon & Curt Hennig ended the year on a high note. They showed tremendous potential to be a leading contender next year if they stay together on SuperStars for most of 1992.

MATCH OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best match of the year, that being the match with the highest workrate, drama, impact, fan heat, and realism - whatever makes a match great in the voter's eyes.

- 1) **STING & LEX LUGER VS. THE STEINER BROTHERS:** May 19, St. Petersburg, Fla. (20%)
- 2) **BRET HART VS. "MR. PERFECT" CURT HENNIG:** Aug. 26, New York, N.Y. (17%)
- 3) **RICK STEAMBOAT & DUSTIN RHODES VS. LARRY ZBYSZKO & ARN ANDERSON:** Nov. 19, Savannah, Ga. (16%)
- 4) **BRIAN PILLMAN & STING & THE STEINERS VS. RIC FLAIR & SID JUSTICE & BARRY WINDHAM & LARRY ZBYSZKO:** Feb. 24, Phoenix, Az. (13%)
- 5) **Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert:** Aug. 3, Philadelphia (11%)
- 6-10) **Randy Savage vs. Ultimate Warrior** (Mar. 24, Los Angeles, Calif.), **Arn Anderson & Barry Windham vs. Butch Reed & Ron Simmons** (Dec. 16, St. Louis, Mo.), **The Rockers vs. The Orient Express** (Jan. 19, Miami, Fla.), **Lightning Kid vs. Jerry Lynn** (Dec. 17, Fridley, Minn.), **Sting vs. Cactus Jack** (Nov., Marietta, Ga.)

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: *Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane vs. Tracy Smothers & Steve Armstrong, Hulk Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior, Nasty Boys vs. The Steiners*
 1989: *Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat (2/20), Flair vs. Steamboat (4/2), Flair vs. Steamboat (5/7)*
 1988: *Ric Flair vs. Sting, Bobby Fulton & Tommy Rogers vs. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane, Flair vs. Lex Luger.*

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: First goes to WarGames from Phoenix. Great action that even Squeegie Sid could not screw up even though he tried. Second goes to Windham & Anderson vs.

Doom in the Street Fight Brawl at Starrcade 89', a realistic brawl from bell to bell. Third goes to Randy Savage vs. Ultimate Warrior from Wrestlemania. It was not a tremendously wrestled match, but it was a tremendously booked match. It was the best WWF style match this year: a dramatic, well-told story.

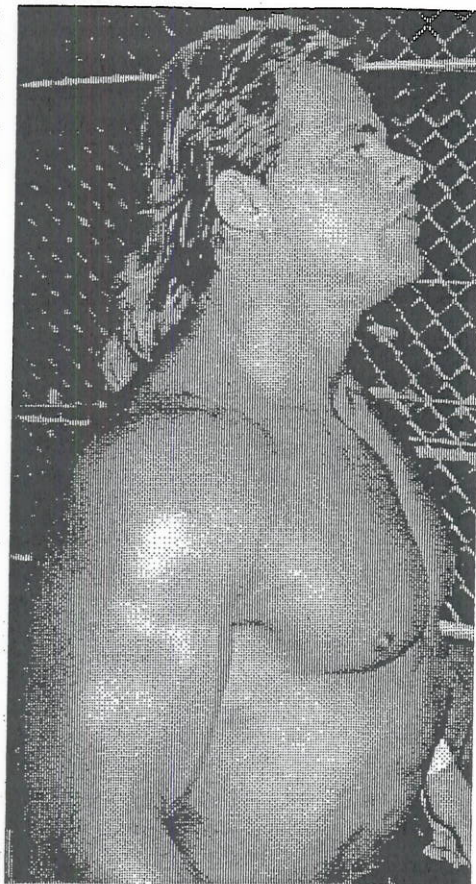
CHRIS ZAVISA: Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert in August in Philadelphia. Cactus Jack vs. Sting in November on TV, "Submit or Surrender". Bobby Eaton & Arn Anderson vs. Rick Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes on Nov. 2 at the Omni in Atlanta. The three-fall epic struggle between Cactus and Gilbert took nearly one full hour and was filled with one great moment after another. When Eddie smashed that wine cooler bottle on Jack's skull, it was almost surreal. Near the end, watching the two men continue to inflict brutal violence upon each other, you wanted to run up to the cage shouting, "Enough already, it's been great. You don't have to do this anymore!" But still, they continued giving the last measure of their abilities and probably blood.

MARK MADDEN: Steiners vs. Hase & Sasaki would get first if it was in North America. WarGames at WrestleWar was the best match on this continent. Eddie Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack triple header is the runner up. I am voting for this on a technicality since it was held under the auspice of WCW... and in front of fans for a change... but the Steiners against Hase & Sasaki was a thrilling blend of American and Japanese styles that showed, to no noticeable good, that a good match without heel or face connotations can get over to American fans. Also, it was the only match this year where Rick showed up to work, a fact I want noted.

ERIC KROL: WarGames from WrestleWar. Great drama, excitement, and the heels won their first WarGames ever. Too bad Justice was rapping with everyone during the match and potatoed Pillman. Ouch! Second goes to Steiners vs. Sting & Luger. My only criticism of that match was the lack of transitions. It seemed like a bunch of hot, hot moves strung together. I did not mind the finish though, as it set up a feud with Nikita. Third goes to Warrior vs. Savage from Wrestlemania. While it certainly was not a mat-wrestling spectacular, it was incredibly well-booked and the four-elbow spot was unique.

READER COMMENTS

STEVE SIMS: Steiners vs. Luger & Sting on 5/19 at WCW SuperBrawl. Rockers vs. Orient Express, 1/19 at the Royal Rumble.



LEX LUGER: PARTICIPANT IN MATCH OF THE YEAR

Steamboat & Rhodes vs. Anderson & Zbyszko, 11/19 Clash XVII. The first match was a real Japanese style bout. The second was I thought the best WWF match since Steamboat vs. Savage on 3/23/91 at Wrestlemania III. The third was the dawn of a new era, hopefully like the old 1989 era, for WCW.

RHONDA CLARK: Steiners vs. Sting & Luger at SuperBrawl '91. Four of the best in the business squaring off against each other. It really doesn't get any better. Move for move, more talent was displayed than any other match in 1991.

BOB FERRETTI: I am going with Steamboat & Rhodes vs. Anderson & Zbyszko from the Nov. 19 Clash. The surprise return of Steamboat was great. The match itself was excellent, all four wrestlers worked their tails off, the crowd heat was intense, and it contained an exciting title change. Runners up: Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert from Aug. 3 in Philadelphia and WarGames from WrestleWar.

DAVE FREY: War Games. Even with Sid Vicious's comments to Rick Steiner and Brian

Pillman. I don't think we will see a bloodbath like that again from WCW. Seeing the Sid Power Bombs (especially the first one) on Pillman was frightening. It is the only match that I replay once in a while.

VINNIE CAROLAN: I have been to hundreds of wrestling cards in my lifetime and two cards that I attended this year had two of the best matches I have ever seen live. The Aug. 3 Philly stretcher match between Cactus Jack and Eddie Gilbert is what pro wrestling is all about. From realistic bumps to chair shots, it was the best match I have ever seen live. Adding the bottle that Gilbert broke over Jack's head, which wasn't gimmicked, to everything else, this may have been the best brawl in Philadelphia history. Sting & Luger vs. The Steiners was the second best match in 1991 that I saw live. The heat for this match was fantastic and there was not a moment when the action slowed down. Third goes to the War Games in Phoenix as it was the last time that WCW fans were on their feet through an entire match.

KEN PHILLIPS: Hart vs. Hennig, Steiners vs. Luger & Sting, and Flair vs. Fujinami. In my opinion, there are three reasons why no one can vote with a clear conscience against Hart vs. Hennig. 1) It was the best match in the WWF since 1987. 2) Hennig should have been nowhere near a ring that night. 3) Unlike Steiners vs. Luger & Sting, ego did not prevent a clean finish.

UNKNOWN #1: Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert on Aug. 3, WarGames, and Steamboat & Rhodes vs. The Enforcers. Jack vs. Gilbert was so different, it had to win. This type of match is so rare today, that it was viewed by half the hardcore fans in this country and it WASN'T EVEN ON TV!

DAN LENNARD: There were a lot of good matches in 1991, but only the Steiners vs. Lex Luger & Sting at SuperBrawl actually got me excited enough to jump out of my seat. It was so nice to see Sting selling for a change. A pity about the screw-job ending. Savage vs. Ultimate Warrior at Wrestlemania had great drama, but it wasn't wrestling. Third goes to Steiners vs. Hase & Chono at Clash XV.

JEFF BENSON: I am going to give Luger & Sting vs. The Steiners the edge over the

WarGames in Phoenix at WrestleWar. Luger & Sting vs. The Steiners was as close to a Japanese style match as we will probably ever get in the U.S. They sold everything, there was no heel, thus no stalling or cheap heat, and the match was filled with excitement. The ending takes away from it, but the WarGames had a screwed up ending, too, so I will go with Luger & Sting vs. Steiners. The WarGames was the most exciting

cut-the-ring-in-half style.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: WarGames was over 20 minutes of nonstop action that reminded me how great wrestling can be at its best. Everybody involved kicked butt and it was the best live match I saw this year. Hase & Sasaki against the Steiners from the Dome was technically exceptional, especially when you consider how much time they probably had to work on the match. Dustin Rhodes and Steve Austin put on a match at the Forum on Nov. 5 that was a 15 minute high spot. Just great chain wrestling, power moves, and heat. The match had everything. They promise a great future for WCW.

GENE HOLMAN: Rick Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes vs. Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko at the Clash. Classic tag team match. Someone swallowed their fatherly pride and let Steamboat carry his team to an easy four-and-a-half star match. When he was in the ring with Anderson, it was Hardcore Heaven. Man, when Jim Ross made the comment about the atmosphere not having been like this in a long time, I found myself nodding in total agreement.

PAUL HANLIN: Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert from Philadelphia on 8/3 was the tops. 'Nuff said. WarGames on Feb. 24 and Steamboat & Rhodes vs. Enforcers from Nov. 19 restored

the little faith I have for American pro wrestling.

MARK COALE: The best American match I saw this year on TV still involved Japanese wrestler, even though it was too short. Giving the recent tag team match at the Clash enough time was a smart move on Dusty's part.

ANTHONY SCALA: Bret Hart vs. Curt Hennig from Aug. 26. Even with a serious back injury, Hennig put everything he had into this match. Coupled with Hart's excellent performance, this gets my vote for match of the year. I was surprised to see such a great wrestling match on a WWF card. Steamboat & Rhodes vs. Enforcers and Savage vs. Warrior are runners-up.

LENNY SKOROS: Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert from Philly in August was the best match I have ever witnessed. More high risk moves and brutality than I have ever seen. I still see that bottle breaking over Jack's head and the blood



CACTUS JACK VS. EDDIE GILBERT (#5)

WarGames I have ever seen and that is saying something because WarGames are easily the most exciting matches every invented, but this one was hot. I hated to see the cheap ending, too. Honorable mention to Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan in Oakland. Only a three-star bout, but the heat live was like nothing I have seen in recent years or will probably ever see again at a live U.S. show, plus it was very historic in its own way.

ROB CONTICELLO: Gilbert vs. Jack. I was there for that match and I have never seen any two wrestlers try harder than they did that night. Some of the wildest brawling I have ever seen. A seat right in our section was covered with Gilbert's blood. Cactus used an umbrella from the guy in the row behind us to beat up Gilbert. Second goes to Hart vs. Hennig, the first excellent match in the WWF since Steamboat vs. Savage in 1987. Hennig was great considering his back was very badly injured. Third goes to Steamboat & Rhodes vs. Enforcers. It was the Enforcers at their best. They used that classic



BARRY WINDHAM: IN #4 MATCH OF THE YEAR starting to flow immediately.

MATT CREAMER: Steiners vs. Hase & Sasaki (TokyoDome), WarGames (WrestleWar), and Steiners vs. Luger & Sting (SuperBrawl). Steiners vs. Hase & Sasaki was easily the most satisfying match of the year. Super action, stiff moves, and best of all, a clean finish. I certainly appreciated that, but as Herd and Dusty will be quick to tell you, I am in the vast minority.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Doom vs. Barry Windham & Arn Anderson on 12/16/90 in St. Louis. Steiners vs. Luger & Sting on 5/19 and WarGames are runners-up. Doom vs. Windham & Anderson was a match that delivered what it advertised. It was a stiff bloody street brawl. There was great action throughout and it was the most legit looking bout of the year. If every match worked in the style of the Steiners vs. Luger & Sting, WCW would be the perfect alternative to the WWF for athletics oriented fans. It was wrestling as it outta be.

ANDY STOWELL: Gilbert vs. Jack from 8/22. Runners-up: Doom vs. Horsemen from Starrcade 90 on 12/16, Hart vs. Hennig at SummerSlam, Steiners vs. Sting & Luger, and Jack vs. Gilbert Aug. 3 in Philadelphia. Gilbert and Jack had great matches whenever they met, but this one absolutely topped the cake. This was the only five-star match in this country this year and it was the most brutal and the most fun brawl of the year. If Gilbert ever leaves wrestling, he has got a job waiting for him at Bartles & James, just so he can potato that old fart Ed the same way he did Cactus Jack. The fact that both guys were able to come back and have a third bloodbath showed that stamina and guts still count for something in this sport. Special mention also to my favorite runner-up match, Horsemen vs. Doom at Starrcade 90. I really thought all year this would win since nothing seemed to be as brutal or as exciting. The best part of this match is the look on Barry

Windham's face on his way to the ring. This is the match where he won back the credibility he lost in 1989. Too bad neither team is together anymore.

IAN GOODWIN: With the cornermen and the three falls, Luger vs. Simmons had the realism and the atmosphere of a heavyweight boxing title match. Despite Squeegee Sid's unprofessional and idiotic screw-ups, WarGames was full of non-stop action from bell to bell. Herb Abrams may be the biggest jerk in the business (and he can sue me over that), but at least he was smart enough to let Williams and Bigelow do their thing. Their brawl was brutally and violently real. These three matches made me feel like lacing up the boots.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Rick Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes vs. The Enforcers from the Clash. An awesome match which hopefully signified a return to competitive wrestling in WCW. This bout restored hopes for the federation.

RICK BARONE: Doom vs. Anderson & Windham from Starrcade. I know it was only about 10 minutes long, but this match was unbelievable, with vicious non-stop action, great high spots during and after the match, and inspired work by all.

STUART BRYNIEN: Hart vs. Hennig from SummerSlam as much for the heat it generated in the capacity crowd as for the non-stop action in the ring. Of course, it helped that I was expecting a virtual walk-over for Hart, due to the injury Hennig was recovering from at the time, but the longer the match lasted and the more Hennig did, the more incredulous and appreciative I became. Even the disappointingly abrupt and anti-climatic finish couldn't spoil it for me. Luger & Sting vs. the Steiners at SuperBrawl. Possibly the first great match I saw last year. This time the tainted ending - Nikita Koloff's run-in - did spoil it for me. Nevertheless, up until then, at least it had been a brisk, action-packed match, one that was filled with so much wrestling and suspense that it actually seemed like a genuine athletic event. That is high praise, indeed. Steamboat & Rhodes vs. Zbyszko & Anderson, from the November Clash. Drama combined with the surprise Dragon appearance as Rhodes's new partner, and things just got better after that. One of the first indications that, as '91 neared an end, WCW finally might have been heading in the right direction.

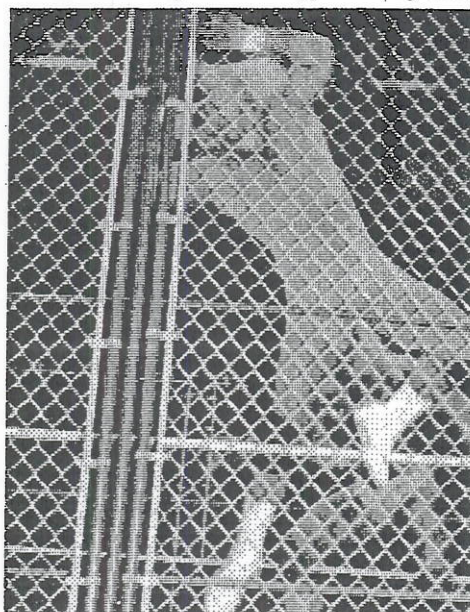
RYAN SCHURK: Hennig vs. Hart at SummerSlam. The Hitman wrestled the match of his life when he became only the third person in WWF history (Santana and Valentine were the first two), to have held the WWF Tag Team and Intercontinental Titles. As far as pure mat wrestling goes, this match can be compared to

those between Flair and Steamboat as a true mat classic. The match was promoted well, and it turned out to be the best match of the night.

JOSEPH PERRY: WarGames from WrestleWar. Not a dull moment in the match, which had a somewhat stoic crowd on its feet and going nuts. If it were not for the cheesy El Gigante throws a towel in the ring ending, this ****3/4 bout might have blown the lid off the five-star rating system.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

After looking over the great matches of 1991, it's scary to think that this was considered a down year for wrestling. The best match I saw was the two out of three falls match between Cactus Jack and Eddie Gilbert. It technically was three different matches: fall count anywhere, stretcher, and cage, and if everyone saw the matches and they were rated separately, they could have finished one-two-three. Together, it is no doubt match of the year in my mind. These two gave more of themselves in that night than most wrestlers do in an entire year. Cactus Jack's bump off the top of the cage and their brawling outside the ring is just incredible stuff. Gilbert's between falls interviews were unbelievable, too. Second goes to Rhodes & Steamboat vs. Anderson & Zbyszko. The perfect tag team



"MR. PERFECT" CURT HENNIG
(VS. BRET HART, #2 Match of the Year)

match. Show this match to a non-fan and they will know why you like wrestling. Show a non-fan Jack vs. Gilbert and they'll think you're crazy. Third goes to Hennig vs. Hart from SummerSlam. Two of the best showed why they are two of the best, not something the WWF gives them the opportunity to show too often.

FEUD OF THE YEAR:

FEUD OF THE YEAR

This award goes to a feud which consisted of more than just once match which featured the greatest combination of action, suspense, great interviews, great angles leading up to it, drama, a reasonable beginning and conclusion. The main stress should be on match quality.

- 1) EDDIE GILBERT VS. CACTUS JACK (24%)
- 2) RIC FLAIR VS. HULK HOGAN (20%)
- 3) STING VS. CACTUS JACK (14%)
- 4) RANDY SAVAGE VS. JAKE ROBERTS (12%)
- 5) UNDERTAKER VS. ULTIMATE WARRIOR (6%)

6-10) Ric Flair vs. Roddy Piper, Ted DiBiase vs. Virgil, Lex Luger vs. Ron Simmons, Dustin Rhodes vs. Steve Austin, Lightning Kid vs. Jerry Lynn.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: *Nasty Boys vs. The Steiners, Ric Flair vs. Sting, Jerry Lawler vs. Eddie Gilbert.*

1989: *Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk, Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat, Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage.*

1988: *Randy Savage vs. Ted DiBiase, Fantastics vs. Midnight Express, Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude.*

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Cactus vs. Gilbert and Hogan vs. Flair. Nothing compared to the series of bouts between Cactus and Gilbert even though it was not a traditional "around the circuit" feud. If WCW was really smart - and forgiving - they would sign Gilbert and treat the whole nation to this in 1992.

MARK MADDEN: Ric Flair vs. Jim Herd and Sid Justice vs. Mike Graham & Brian Pillman. There were no really good feuds in North American wrestling in 1990, but I am picking Flair vs. Herd and Justice vs. Graham & Pillman because I liked the denouements. Flair took his first step towards the WWF and everlasting fame while Herd took his first step towards the unemployment line. Justice, meanwhile, was involved in a rare clean finish as he ran like a yellow dog from the Yellow Dog

and an old dog, both of whom would have taught Mr. Softball a few new tricks by kicking his limited-flight butt from here to the USSSA World Series.

ERIC KROL: Sting vs. Rude had great angles and execution. Sting even actually seemed to care. This sets Rude up as a great challenger when Sting gets the strap in February. Second goes to the Pistols vs. Patriots. Just kidding, but there sure was a lot of TV time devoted to it. Second goes to Hogan vs. Flair, for the sheer magnitude of it actually happening, and third to Luger vs. Simmons, because it was well-done.

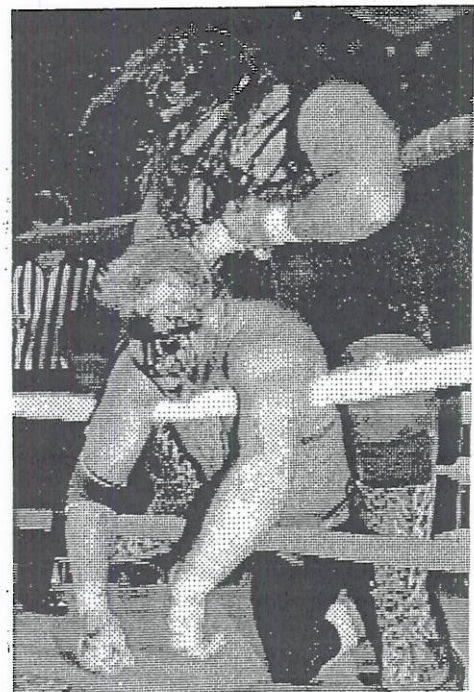
BRUCE MITCHELL: The best feud was Sting vs. Cactus Jack. This revived Sting from the coma he had been in and made a mainstream star out of Cactus Jack. Great brawls. Flair vs. Hogan should have won this, but the last thing the Hulkster seemed to care about this year was wrestling.

READER COMMENTS

DAN LENNARD: Anderson vs. Eaton, Warrior vs. Savage, and Windham vs. Pillman. It was a lousy year for feuds. Flair vs. Fujinami and Flair vs. Hogan should have blown away all the others, but they were stuffed up by bad booking and average matches. For me, Anderson vs. Eaton was a great feud while it lasted. It was a classic combination of Anderson's great interviews and brawling, and Eaton's flying moves and fantastic matwork.

DAVE PRAZAK: I hate to say it, but Hogan vs. Slaughter. Although the main point of this feud was exploiting the United States-Iraqi war, this was clearly the feud of the year. The fans expressed extreme hatred toward Slaughter and even the Hogan-haters were forced to "feel for him". Second place goes to Undertaker vs. Warrior. From the so-so casket angle to the body bag matches, this feud was very intriguing. Third place goes to Hogan vs. Flair, which was great from the pre-match interviews to the great bouts.

JOSEPH PERRY: Although it didn't last long, the Sting vs. Cactus Jack feud was for me the most interesting feud this year, topping even that of the much-anticipated but little delivered Flair vs. Hogan feud. The Sting vs. Cactus match that I saw live in San Jose was, in retrospect, more exciting from a sheer wrestling standpoint than the first Flair vs. Hogan bout in Oakland, which I also saw in person.



CACTUS JACK VS. EDDIE GILBERT: 1991 FEUD OF THE YEAR

ROSS LAIDLAW: Flair vs. Hogan is the dream match that wrestling fans spent years thinking about. Flair vs. Hogan, champion vs. champion, both kings of their own kingdoms for years. This is too big not to be number one.

STEVE FISCHER: For drama there was not a better angle than the Savage-Roberts snake bite. With the blood, Elizabeth crying, and Piper going crazy, it drained every ounce of emotion

from your body.

ROB CONTICELLO: Eddie Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack. It was just a classic series of matches that sometimes brought out the mark in me. It really did look like they wanted to kill each other. Hogan vs. Flair. Even though McMahon is blowing it, he got me to plunk down \$20 to see their match live. The atmosphere was just incredible. Luger vs. Simmons gets third. WCW finally showed some competence. They actually managed to set up a realistic feud with some good wrestling.

RYAN SCHURK: Ted DiBiase vs. Virgil. After gaining a victory

over Dusty and Dustin Rhodes at last year's Royal Rumble, Virgil and DiBiase were involved in a bitter altercation, which resulted in two historic confrontations at Wrestlemania and SummerSlam.

MARK COALE: Hogan vs. Flair wins feud of the year because of its historical importance. For sheer heat and intensity, Savage vs. Roberts is just amazing. Gilbert vs. Jack gets third based on the wars those two had in Philadelphia.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Dustin Rhodes vs. Steve Austin, WCW's showcase for their future. I forgot about Dustin's daddy real quick after seeing this set of matches. The bout the two had at the Forum in November was probably only second to War Games for live matches in my book this year. Second goes to Flair vs. Hogan. Strictly for Flair's work in the early part of the feud. It's really not much of a feud since Hogan just does not seem to care. I would give third to Pillman vs. Windham. I cannot say that the Yellow Dog angle was compelling, but the two did have some great matches.

GENE HOLMAN: Sting vs. Cactus Jack mainly because of Cactus's psycho interviews and his insane bumps. Oh, yeah, Sting was there, too.

STUART BRYNIEN: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan, if only because it brought together the two leading performers in the two biggest promotions in the country. Their matches, after a while, have become well, predictably predictable - but the feud itself was so newsworthy, how could it not rank at the top of the list? Paul E. Dangerously vs. Jim Herd and the "steering committee" was not an angle when it started, but

after some overdue concessions to Dangerously by WCW management - not to mention some clever booking, Dangerously made his triumphant comeback and it was turned into an angle... and a pretty effective one at that. And who doubted the legitimacy of Dangerously's wrath in his controversial "shoot" interview at Halloween Havoc? Finally, Vince McMahon vs.

the media regarding steroids.

RICK BARONE: Jake Roberts vs. Randy Savage, only because there were not many feuds at all and I am in absolute awe of Roberts's heel character.

RYAN JONES: Hogan vs. Flair. Too bad it was not two years ago instead.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan. This was not a good year for feuds. Most WCW feuds were pointless and simply ended with no real conclusion, such as Windham vs. Pillman. On the other hand, WWF feuds had clear focuses and angles, but no heat or quality match-ups, such as Hogan vs. Slaughter. On the independent circuit, Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert was awesome, but wasn't really long enough to constitute a feud. Hogan vs. Flair at least made sense, had some hot interviews and angles, some good (though not exactly great) matches, and temporarily boosted arena attendance.

IAN GOODWIN: Sting vs. Cactus Jack, Undertaker vs. Ultimate Warrior, and Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert. Though they never performed in front of a sold-out arena, Sting and Cactus Jack provided the best matches on a nightly basis. They might not have had great matches, but Undertaker and Ultimate Warrior drew the biggest gates. Cactus and Gilbert worked some classic brawls albeit on a tri-monthly basis.

ANDY STOWELL: Ultimate Warrior vs. Undertaker. Runner-up, Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack, Lightning Kid vs. Jerry Lynn. This was the feud last summer, outdrawing Hogan and finally making the Warrior a legit main eventer (except everyone was paying to see Undertaker). The initial coffin stuffing angle was some of the best

and most hardcore stuff they've ever done at Titan. Also, the "Body Bag" match is a gimmick that will be around for years to come. It is just too bad that Vince McMahon gave up on Warrior when he finally found something that would work for the guy.

JEFF COHEN: Vince McMahon waited for the right angle. I just wish Flair had been the one to nail him when Piper was trying to sacrifice himself. The sight of Flair nailing Vince would have been awesome, but maybe Vince knew it would wind up on too many hardcore fans' tapes.

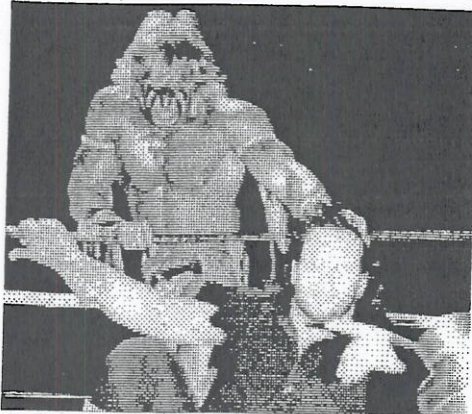
PAUL HANLIN: Every instinct I have tells me just for the fact that it finally happened, Hogan vs. Flair should be first. But from every report I have read, their matches have not been good, though not due to Flair. I'm taking a chance and picking Lightning Kid vs. Jerry Lynn as first. Hogan vs. Flair just misses and comes in runner-up.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

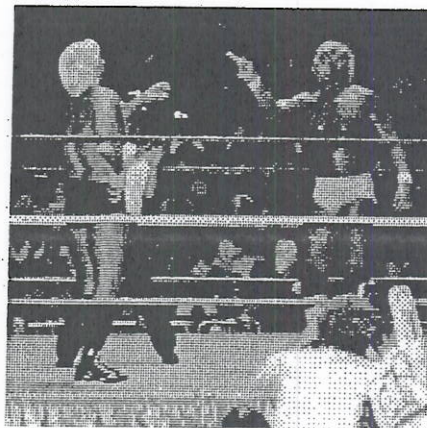
Eddie Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack is my first pick. It really went beyond a feud of the year in some ways and fell short in others. It fell short in that it did not have TV shows to promote it through angles and interviews and other such build up. It was also missing the night after night type of repetition that most feuds on major circuits experience. It was more than feud of the year in that every time the two wrestled in the TWA, they had the best matches of the year by many

standards. Wrestling three matches in one night - a stretcher match, cage match, and falls-count-anywhere match - was an incredible feat. It also gained national hardcore fame without any TV broadcasts through tape trading and people travelling hundreds of miles to see their matches. Second goes to Dustin Rhodes vs. Steve Austin which was a

pure feud in the ring. It features very good to beyond great matches most nights around the horn and proved to most that Austin and Rhodes are a big part of the future of pro wrestling. Third goes to Hogan vs. Flair for the sheer magnitude of the build-up - ten years worth - and the quality, albeit inconsistent - of the matches. The crowd heat was incredible and fan interest peaked during the year for this feud. It falls short of first simply because the quality of the matches was not consistently in four-star range, which makes it tough to come in first when the main stress of this category is match quality.



UNDERTAKER VS. ULTIMATE WARRIOR (#5)



RIC FLAIR VS. HULK HOGAN (#2)

BEST ANGLE OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best angle, that being the best incident or confrontation which was not a wrestling match that was used to build up a feud or wrestling match. Success of the feud the angle promoted is not necessary for the angle to still be considered "great".

1) UNDERTAKER LOCKS ULTIMATE WARRIOR IN A CASKET (38%)

2) THE BUILD-UP AND ENTRANCE OF RIC FLAIR INTO THE WWF (18%)

3) RANDY SAVAGE BITTEN BY JAKE ROBERTS'S COBRA (15%)

4) VINCE MCMAHON HIT BY CHAIR DURING RIC FLAIR-RODDY PIPER BRAWL (9%)

5) CACTUS JACK, ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER, AND MADUSA POP OUT OF STING'S GIFT BOXES (9%)

6-10) Randy Savage & Elizabeth's Engagement and Marriage, The Return of Paul E. Dangerously and his formation of the Dangerous Alliance, Virgil leaves Ted DiBiase, Ron Simmons's push as a "real" athlete, and Tug Taylor reunites with his son Chaz.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Eddie Gilbert hits Jerry Lawler with speeding car, Barry Windham doubles as Sting and gets pinned, Sting thrown out of the Horsemen.

1989: Terry Funk attacks Ric Flair, Jim Cornette attacks the Dynamic Dudes, Robin Green/Woman turns on the Steiners.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

MARK MADDEN: The Flair, Piper, and McMahon angle, followed by Ultimate Warrior-Jake Roberts and Hogan convenes the Liar's Club on Arsenio Hall. When Flair clubbed Piper with the belt and Piper hit Vince with an errant chair, it looked like McMahon was going to let Flair be the hottest heel the WWF had seen in quite some time. A great, well-done angle made unique by the involvement of McMahon. The

Warrior vs. Roberts trilogy was solid as well, a very close second. I mention Hogan's appearance on Arsenio Hall because it was indeed an angle, helped along by the poor man's Eddie Murphy's butt-smooching ways. Gene Okerlund has nothing on Arsenio Hall, believe me. Gimmie Geraldo any day.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Nobody expected Titan would bring in Flair with the excellent build-up complete with Bobby Heenan and the NWA strap. For one month most of us tuned in to weekly Titan TV like never before with a VCR remote in hand. Of course, shortly after Flair's arrival, Titan proceeded to botch the whole thing and revert to true form.

BRUCE MITCHELL: The introduction of Ric Flair into the WWF. No contest.

ERIC KROL: Jake Roberts vs. Randy Savage with the snake bite. This was incredibly hardcore - maybe too hardcore for even the hardcores. I mean, kids were terrified. How great! Liz still needs acting lessons though. Second goes to Jake Roberts and Ultimate Warrior in the snake room. Sure, it was hokey as hell, and yes it was not what wrestling was about, and yes it was a circus, but I loved it anyway. In a year of boring nothingness, this piqued my interest.

READER COMMENTS

IAN GOODWIN: Ultimate Warrior gets snake-bitten, Lex Luger attacks Sting's leg at the Clash, and Cactus attacks Sting at the Fall Brawl Clash. As far-fetched as it was, the angle where Jake Roberts had the snake bite the Ultimate Warrior was well-produced and just as good as a B-horror movie. The Luger-Sting-Rude angle at the November Clash was dramatically exciting and perfectly played out. Cactus's attack on Sting led to a wild brawl and some excellent bouts.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Ric Flair annihilating Roddy Piper on Superstars was awesome! Only one thing would have made it sweeter: Flair racking McMahon with the chair! The forming of the Dangerous Alliance. I also liked the whole Sting hospital angle at the November Clash. The hospital reports with Bishoff and the arena map along with the drama of Sting's return to the arena were very entertaining.

GENE HOLMAN: Ron Simmons's push as an "All-American". With the past portrayal of African-Americans as subhuman monster heels or illiterate shuffling idiot faces, this was a

refreshing change. Luger's racist comment at the Fall Brawl almost ruined it, but not quite. My only question is, after that monster push, what's next?

DAN LENNARD: Savage interfering in Ultimate Warrior vs. Sgt. Slaughter at the Royal Rumble was brilliant in its execution. It helped set up two hot feuds - Warrior vs. Savage and Slaughter vs. Hogan - and a hot "loser leaves wrestling" match at Wrestlemania. Flair entering the WWF as the true world champion is second. Dangerously re-entering WCW as Rick Rude's manager at Halloween Havoc is third.



JAKE ROBERTS, INVOLVED IN #3 ANGLE OF THE YEAR

DAVE FREY: Paul E. Dangerously returning to WCW after his shoot interview. Was it an angle, though?

MARIE DALZELL: Tug Taylor and Chaz being father and son. I am not quite sure why I liked this so much, but I guess it just struck my fancy. Maybe it has something to do with me being a mother.

ROB CONTICELLO: Flair's introduction into the WWF really sent chills up and down your spine. Heenan holding that big gold belt, comparing Hogan to horse manure. Flair's first appearance on Primetime was great, too. I never thought that I would see the day. Cactus Jack's birthday party for Sting. It was simply awesome, maybe better than Flair's Prime Time appearance. I hope it made all the little Stingers go crying to their parents. Scott Anthony dressing up as a woman and attacking the Handsome Stranger. It was very well done, and this looked like it was going to become Global's biggest feud until the Stranger jumped ship.

ANTHONY SCALA: Randy Savage and Elizabeth's reunion at Wrestlemania VII. No angle had the drama and impact that this one did. It was done with perfection. Second place goes to Vince McMahon's bump. Is there anyone that didn't love seeing him get hit? Third goes to Undertaker locking Warrior in the casket.

MATT CREAMER: Flair attacks Piper on podium, Ultimate Warrior-Undertaker casket lock-in, and Paul E. Dangerously hitting Jason Hervey with the phone. What more could you ask for in an angle? Flair with an attitude, an unprovoked attack, chairs shots, great bumps, mass chaos, and Vince McMahon getting obliterated. Loved it. The only thing I can think of being more fun is during an in-ring melee Dusty Rhodes kicking Jim Herd in the crotch.

MARK COALE: The significance of Vince McMahon even partially acknowledging the existence of another organization should be enough to win this award. I am sooo happy Jake Roberts is a heel again, especially his original turn buried in the Ultimate Warrior. I thought Simmons's hype as a real athlete was handled the best since Bill Watts did the same thing with Steve Williams. Of course, Watts did it better.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Flair attacks Piper with the chair. Undertaker puts Warrior in a coffin. Roberts attacks Savage with the snake. Flair attacking Piper started their feud strongly. Unfortunately, Piper not selling and less than stiff working hurt their matches and their feud.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Flair-Piper-McMahon chair angle. A great angle which put Flair over to the WWF fans as a big time heel. It was

perfectly executed, and achieved exactly the results that were intended. After all, Vince McMahon doesn't do a stretcher job for just anybody.

RICK BARONE: Seeing Vince McMahon get hit with the chair was enough to get my vote.

STUART BRYNIEN: Flair's arrival in the WWF as the real World Champion gets first. For the same reasons his feud with Hogan rates so high, in a stroke of genius, McMahon used Flair's dismissal from WCW to improve P.R. for his organization and set up a long series of what he hoped would be big-purse matches. Was that opportunistic, or what? Second goes to Savage hemming and hawing on weekly T.V. about whether he loved the lovely Miss Elizabeth enough to marry her. Great stuff at the announcer's desk as Macho debated the merits of marriage with his mike-mates every week. "Queen" Sherri's transformation into "Million Dollar" Sherri after the Macho King lost to the Warrior at Wrestlemania - because it has led to a pairing that has been even more fun to watch: Sherri and DiBiase.

JOSEPH PERRY: I got a legit shiver up my spine when Paul E. Dangerously made those shoot comments just before unveiling Rick Rude as his latest acquisition.

DAVID FREY: Ric Flair as the "real world champion". Runners up: The Sting injury angle, despite Luger being behind the "gifts" didn't make much sense, at the last Clash was done pretty well.

DAVE PRAZAK: Flair vs. Piper on

Superstars was classic. From Flair wacking Piper on the head with the belt to McMahon taking the chair hump, this was a great set-up for their feud. Second place goes to the Sting gift-box angles with Cactus and Abby which were memorable. Third place goes to Ricky Morton's turn on Robert Gibson which was perfectly done with Morton's possible quote of the year: "I've waited ten years to do this."

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: No question, the build-up of Ric Flair in the WWF was impressive for the first few weeks. The mysterious and shocking incident where Heenan came on Wrestling Challenge must have shocked the heck out of fans who do not follow any wrestling media. Heenan's interviews combined with Flair's first interview on Prime Time was a brilliant build-up that set Flair apart from other wrestlers who enter the WWF. However, the next few months through Royal Rumble in 1992 really made Flair into "just another wrestler". Second goes to the formation of the Dangerous Alliance and Paul E. Dangerously's return to WCW on the November Clash. It was one of the signs that WCW was changing. His interview had the perfect mix of realism and intensity. The unveiling of Rick Rude topped off a great series of incidents. Third goes to Ron Simmons's build-up through showing his history at Florida State University. The match between him and Luger at Halloween Havoc reflected a realism that was evident in the build-up, both of which I would like to see more of in the future. Pride and a desire to be number one were the main motivations of the angle building up to the match. There is a shortage of angles like that in wrestling.

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the wrestler who improved most since the start of 1991.

1) DUSTIN RHODES (35%)

2) STEVE AUSTIN (18%)

3) CACTUS JACK (13%)

4) JOHNNY B. BADD (7%)

5) RON SIMMONS (7%)

6-10) Virgil, Terry Taylor, Mr. Hughes, Rick Steamboat, Scott Anthony.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Ron Simmons, Scott Steiner, Butch Reed

1989: Lex Luger, Scott Steiner, Butch Reed

1988: Sting, Rick Steiner, Lex Luger

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Dustin Rhodes, Cactus Jack, and Johnny B. Badd. Many hardcores had it in for Rhodes from the minute he appeared on the scene, but since his return to WCW he has been a solid and dependable worker who is deserving of the push he gets. He still gets to work all the best spots and against all the better workers, but Rhodes more than holds up his end of the deal.

ERIC KROL: Steve Austin continued to show poise, so he gets second. Badd gets rookie of the year and most improved. Third goes to Ron Simmons with honorable mention to Dustin Rhodes.

MARK MADDEN: Cactus Jack followed by Steve Austin. Austin started out good and became great and Cactus started out great and

became headed towards the Hall of Fame if he does not do something stupid like blow out his hip or elbow or (fill in body part here).

BRUCE MITCHELL: Rick Steamboat upon his late 1991 entrance into WCW. His days in the WWF were dismal and he has sparked in WCW.

READER COMMENTS

DAN LENNARD: As much as I dislike Sting, he had a great year in '91. He seems to have fully recovered from the injury that made him so hesitant to do the high-risk moves in '90. He had some great matches in '91. Larry Zbyszko and Dustin Rhodes get runner up slots.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Curtis Hughes has shown a ton of improvement as Mr. Hughes. The gimmick has helped, but he's not the same Big

Cat that I could not have cared less about a year ago. Dustin Rhodes and Billy Black are runners up.

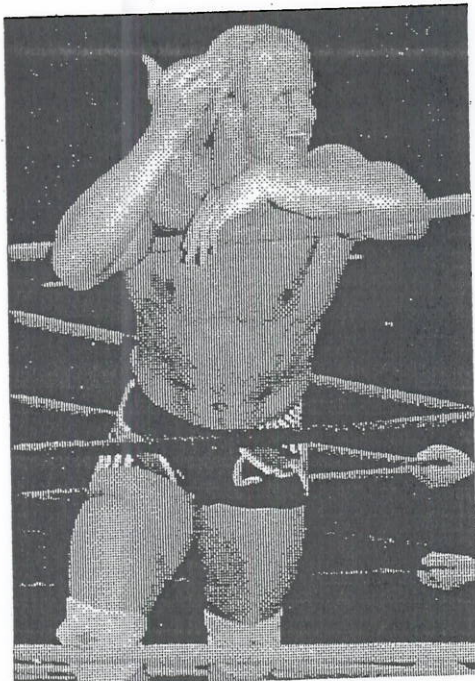
MARK COALE: It is really hard to believe Steve Austin is just a sophomore in this business. He is that good. Cactus Jack's brawling ability has actually gotten better.

MARIE DALZELL: Dustin Rhodes. Even though I do not care for him, I do have to say that he has improved markedly since he returned to WCW.

ROB CONTICELLO: Cactus Jack. He has really perfected the psychotic image and he has improved both in his interviews and his wrestling style. Brian Pillman. He really impressed me in the first half of the year with his great set of matches against Barry Windham. I hope WCW doesn't pigeonhole him just as a light heavyweight. Bret Hart gets thirds since he showed he could be more than just at tag team wrestler. I hope the WWF will start giving him talented opponents to work with.

DAVE PRAZAK: Dustin Rhodes. He put together solid matches that went to draws with Steve Austin and captured the tag belts with Steamboat in a great match. All-around improvement by Rhodes. Second place goes to Del Wilkes who went from being the Trooper to the amazing Patriot. Third place goes to Ron Simmons, whose title feud with Luger was great, as well as his enhanced ring awareness.

JIM MURPHY: Since he was so deprived last year, Sting has sure come a long way back in the past few months. True, he has been working



"STUNNING" STEVE AUSTIN (#2)

with Cactus Jack and Rick Rude, but he seems to try during his matches now. Runner-up: Johnny B. Badd has shown phenomenal improvement during his rookie year and Stunning Steve Austin continues to hone his game.

GENE HOLMAN: Ron Simmons, and not all because of his push. I think he got a lot better in the ring and his interviews, though rambling at times, were very sincere and probably had a few people thinking he was going to be the "first black world champion".

JOSEPH PERRY: "Stunning" Steve Austin continues to amaze. His skills far surpass that of anyone else who has wrestled as long as he has. Keep it up, Steve, and you will be winning that Wrestler of the Year category soon.

JEFF COHEN: Steve Austin will be the WCW Champion by 1994 at this rate. However, if Dusty Rhodes starts jobbing him, I change my prediction to WWF Intercontinental Champion later that year.

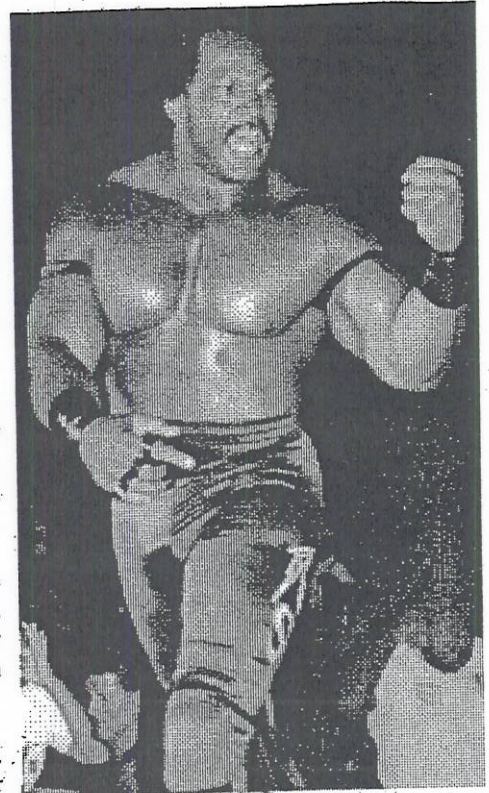
DON SMITH: Dustin Rhodes and Sgt. Slaughter. Rhodes was good when the year started, but he has gotten even better. If fans will forgive him for being Dusty Rhodes's son, he will be a major star in the very near future as well as one of several legitimate choices for WCW champion. Slaughter worked hard in 1991 and certainly improved over his lackluster level of performance in the AWA.

RHONDA CLARK: Dustin Rhodes. Even though he has a great many influences in his career, especially his father, he has made vast improvements over the past year. He has worked hard for all he has gained in his career.

MARIE DALZELL: Steve Austin was the most improved wrestler and he deserves a chance at the top spot with WCW. Next year he should contend for outstanding wrestler of the year. It pains me to say this, but Dustin Rhodes has gotten much better. He is a "natural", but I still refuse to like him. Finally, Scott Anthony, who has become the highlight of GWF broadcasts.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Steve Austin is wrestling as well as many veterans. His primary WCW opponents in 1991, Bobby Eaton and Dustin Rhodes, have complemented his ring style very nicely. WCW would be smart to do whatever is necessary to keep this guy from McMahon.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Steve Austin, Virgil, and Mr. Hughes. Austin wrestled a large variety of opponents and proved that if used correctly he can someday be the WCW champion. I picked Virgil second because he improved immensely



RON SIMMONS (#5)

from Wrestlemania on. He is one WWF wrestler who seems to try to have a good match and seems to improve and add moves to his repertoire.

DAVE FREY: Rick Steamboat. Leaving the WWF did it. This is a category which says something about the business in 1991.

MATT CREAMER: Cactus Jack, Steve Austin, and Johnny B. Badd. Although I am obviously extremely biased, Cactus Jack has steadily become a fantastic worker. His psychology is good. His work is still consistent and his high-risk moves and subsequent pumps are amazing. He is the only man I know that makes squash matches watchable.

IAN GOODWIN: Dustin Rhodes is no longer the over-pushed son of the booker. He is a good worker and a future superstar.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Dustin Rhodes and Steve Austin battle for first with Rhodes getting the nod. These two were incredible, both against each other and against others. They are a big part of the future of wrestling. Mr. Hughes and Johnny B. Badd are tied for third. Badd, just a rookie, was a joke at the beginning of the year and turned into a much improved worker - with a long way to go. Hughes could be a huge part of this business and comparisons to Big Bossman are justified. Hopefully this will not be another case of loss potential as happened with Buzz Sawyer.

MOST DETERIORATED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the wrestler whose ring work has deteriorated the most since the beginning of 1991.

Junkyard Bulldog, aka Davey Boy Smith. Maybe he was indisposed when Vince McMahon lectured the boys on the evils of steroid use. He's definitely out to lunch talent-wise.

1) HULK HOGAN (18%)

2) LEX LUGER (12%)

3) RODDY PIPER (10%)

4) BRITISH BULLDOG (9%)

5) STING (6%)

6-10) Greg Valentine, Rick Steiner, Jimmy Snuka, Thomas Rich, Michael Hayes.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Sting, Dusty Rhodes, Kerry Von Erich.

1989: Terry Taylor, Dino Bravo, Hacksaw Duggan.

1988: Dusty Rhodes, Greg Valentine, Ken Patera.

CARLIE GILL: Lex Luger. He wrestles like he doesn't care anymore and it shows. He should leave until he can come back with a better attitude. Maybe he'll win most improved next year!

GENE HOLMAN: Sting. I still think that with the right promotion and the right opponents, Sting can be a great world champion. Evidently he doesn't think so and it showed this year. C'mon Stinger, bum knee or not, I have faith in ya'. You can show us in 1992

VINNIE CAROLAN: Greg Valentine should take this one with no problem. It is not that he does not try his hardest because I do believe he is trying, but if I said he is a shell of the old Greg Valentine, then I would be pretty generous. The funny thing about this is that fans at the arenas have picked up the "too legit to quit" chant for him. I think the chant should be changed to "too much of a twit to quit". Second goes to Hercules the horrible as he is no better than Valentine.

RHONDA CLARK: Lex Luger. This man went from great to average and many fans do not like his fickleness or arrogance. He never beat "the man" and never will "be the man".

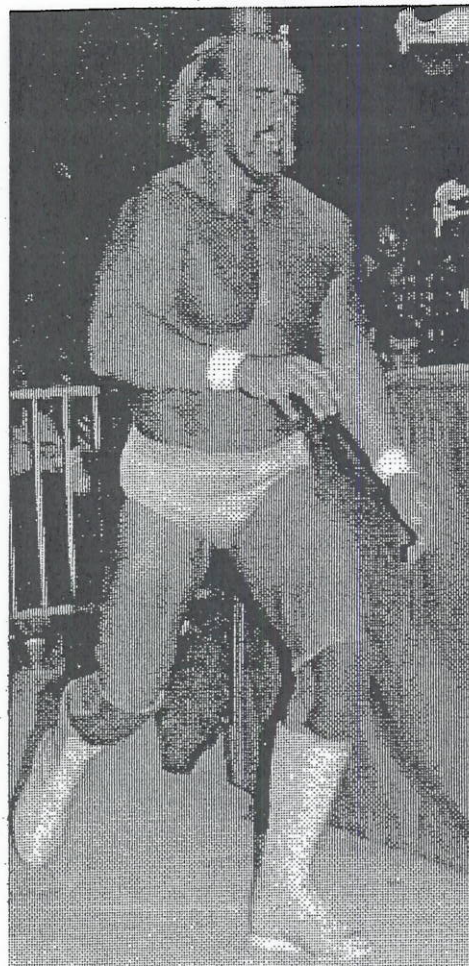
ANDY STOWELL: Jake Roberts's heel turn was a thing of beauty and his interviews send chills down my spine, and you would think he would be really up, since he is the number one heel, but boy Roberts's matches really stink. I saw the first match between Roberts and Justice at a TV taping in wheeling, W.Va. and the place acted like they were going to fall asleep any second. McMahon and J.J. Dillon were watching from the back and even they were not enjoying themselves. Roberts really needs to get his ass in gear if he wants to stay on top this year.

PAUL HANLIN: King of this hill is the

IAN GOODWIN: Face it, he is no longer "The Man". Ric Flair's act was already old and

tired in WCW. Now, he is just a joke in Titan. If he was still in WCW, he would not even be the fifth best worker in the company. Looking back, I am kind of glad he is gone from WCW. Now, some younger workers have been allowed to show their stuff. Flair was great.

LENNY SKOROS: Lex Luger goes through the motions in all his matches. He was terrible since he got the strap. The Undertaker. He is a total stiff now. In WCW, he showed a lot more ability. The Legion of Doom gets third, mainly due to lack of any competition.



HULK HOGAN, MOST DETERIORATED OF 1991

GABRIEL DAIGLE: I didn't have to think twice. Jim Duggan is pathetic. He is not even a shadow of his former self and should just get a job as a cheerleader since that is all he does anyway. Wait! I see an angle. What about Duggan as a resurrected Gobbledygooker? Second goes to Jimmy "I Can't Fly" Snuka, who doesn't even have the spring to leap over a frog on his leap frogs anymore. What a waste. Finally, Greg Valentine is way past his prime. But at least he gave us forty minutes in the Rumble. I will try to remember these three in their heyday if they retire immediately.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Hulk Hogan, Jim Neidhart, and Roddy Piper. Hogan and his non-selling has proved that he is an egomaniac who

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Michael Hayes, Jimmy Garvin, and Davey Boy Smith. Hayes has dropped to the level where he is useless in any capacity. The rumor had it that Jim Herd was a big Hayes fan, but with Herd back in St. Louis, I cannot imagine why WCW would keep Hayes. Same goes for Garvin.

ERIC KROL: Greg Valentine. At every Titan card I attended, his was the bathroom match. He just does not care anymore.

BRUCE MICHELL: Rick Steamboat in his WWF days deteriorated more than anyone else in wrestling.

MARK MADDEN: Rick Steiner, Hulk Hogan, and Sting. Sting was too lazy to have good matches with Ric Flair. Hogan was too much of a jerk to have good matches with Flair. But Rick Steiner was too lazy and too much of a jerk to have good matches with anybody. What a waste of very promising talent.

READER COMMENTS

MARIE DALZELL: Second runner up is the very talented, but lazy as hell, Rick Steiner. How much are they paying him to go through the motions? Ricky Morton just is not a singles wrestler and has not had a good year at all. Finally, as an old fan of the Fabulous Ones, I am so disappointed in Steve Keirn. I don't really

has total disregard for the sport except for himself. He even sold and did the job for a stiff like the Ultimate Warrior. If only he would sell for Flair.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Sid Justice. Talk about overrated. At least when he was Sid Vicious, he could entertain us by turning stretchers over after his matches. Currently he is sidelined with a serious case of squeegeeophobia.

RYAN JONES: Hulk Hogan doesn't try anymore. He just goes through the motions. He has it all, so why try, even against Flair? He hasn't found a reason. Runner up: I.R.S.

STUART BRYNIEN: Hulk Hogan's matches are duller than ever. Only a real wrestler or at the very least a real bump artist can carry him anymore. And even then, Hogan's limited offense can slow the action to a crawl. Of course, it is far too late for him to take that moth-eaten finish - the foot to the face and legdrop - stuff it away somewhere, and try something else. I sure do wish it wasn't, though. Runner-up: Jim Neidhart and Kerry Von Erich.

JEFF COHEN: Duggan is a waste. Why people pay to see this guy is beyond me. What do they think they're gonna see?



LEX LUGER (#2)

RYAN SCHURK: Lex Luger. After several years of trying, Lex Luger finally captured the WCW World Title. Two negatives to this match: First, Luger did not, due to failed contract negotiations resulting in his firing, wrestle long-time rival Ric Flair. Second is that he defeated Barry Windham instead, whose career has also taken a turn for the worse. Since winning the belt, the quality of Luger's matches has gone down.

ROSS LAIDLAW: Lex Luger is the same guy that we have saw last year. He inherited the World Title after Flair left and had little competition during the year. He is a far cry from the young rugged Lex Luger. Runners up: Ted DiBiase and Beverly Brothers.

DAN LENNARD: It is hard to believe that in 1989, Davey Boy Smith carried Dynamite Kid and the Malenkos to one of the best matches of the year. In 1991, Smith degenerated into a lazy, juiced-to-the-eyeballs bum. El Gigante and Hulk Hogan are runners up.

JOSEPH PERRY: Jake Roberts has been fantastic on interviews, but lazier than hell in the ring lately, from the cheesy blindfold match at Wrestlemania VII to his recent debacles with Randy Savage.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Hulk Hogan went downhill this year more than any other year. Part of it had to be the psychological wear of being involved in two controversies, exploitation of a war and the steroid controversy. He was the leader in negative publicity and when the chance came to prove he was at least somewhat worthy of praise in history books - that being when Ric Flair entered the WWF - he could not inspire himself to work anything more than an average match. Second goes to Michael Hayes who could drop 20 pounds and become a star again. Third goes to Davey Boy Smith who is one of few perfect examples of what had gone wrong in professional wrestling over the last eight to ten years.

BEST WEEKLY TV SHOW OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best overall regular weekly TV show during 1991.

- 1) WCW SATURDAY NIGHT SHOW (38%)
- 2) WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING (24%)
- 3) WWF PRIME TIME WRESTLING (10%)
- 4) WCW PRO NEW YORK (7%)
- 5) GWF MAJOR LEAGUE WRESTLING (6%)
- 6-10) USWA Live On WMC, GWF Supercard on ESPN, WWF Wrestling Challenge, WCW Power Hour, WCW World Wide Wrestling.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: WCW Sat., WWF Superstars, USWA Challenge.

1989: NWA World Championship, NWA Power Hour, WWF Superstars.

1988: WWF Superstars, NWA World Championship, WWF Saturday Night Main Event.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS:

BRUCE MITCHELL: WCW Worldwide had the best combination of matches and interviews from week to week.

ERIC KROL: Just because it had non-squashes, WCW Saturday. WWF Superstars gets second, mostly because they made good use of the TV this year.

MARK MADDEN: WCW Saturday night first. WWF Superstars second. WCW Saturday Night is still the show to watch for North American wrestling hardcores, but it's only that by default.

CHRIS ZAVISA: WCW Saturday Night, WWF Prime Time, and WCW Main Event. Over the last few months, the WCW Saturday show on TBS has been really good viewing with solid matches, good presentation, and the right mix of wrestlers. In fact, I have heard some people criticize them for giving away too much for free. Speaking as a fan, I will take all I can get for free. Titan's Prime Time has improved greatly since they dumped the butt-kissing audience of shills and improved the quality of the bouts they showcased.

READER COMMENTS:

MARK COALE: I base this voting on the quality of TV matches. While Global may not have better talent, they have "main event" matches on every week. WCW's Saturday show is much improved as of late, especially with Steamboat, Austin, Eaton, and Anderson wrestling on TV every week. Prime Time is a default third, but I do like the new roundtable format, because it gives Hennig and Heenan the chance to do good schtick.

DAVE PRAZAK: The WWF's "Prime Time Wrestling" continuously features matches from MSG as well as other TV taping matches that are normally "dark matches" to the non-cable viewers.

JIM MURPHY: Based on the end of the year alone, WCW Saturday on TBS. Liger vs. Benoit alone would get this since the rest of the TV output this year by both major groups sucked.

GREG BERRYHILL: WCW Saturday did a 180 degree turn since the start of the year. The matches were exciting. It was worth taping the shows again.

STEVE FISCHER: WCW Saturday night show in the latter months of the year was what a wrestling should be. It had major angles, live interviews, and most importantly, great wrestling.

JOSEPH PERRY: Portland Pro Wrestling always had enough interesting moments each week to make me think, "I'm glad I watched the whole show." Painless to sit through compared to Superstars, Challenge, Main Event, Global Supercard, and just about anything else. Besides run-ins involving Cheerios and milk, Don Owen screwing up names, Billy Jack Haynes pushing Don Coss around while using shoot comments, etc., PPW provided two of life's certainties:

Sandy Barr ref bumps and Al Madril raising a not on it. stink about kids being admitted free.

RYAN SCHURK: WWF "Prime Time". The new weekly debate format gives an interesting new look to the show. I also am glad to see that instead of having one "feature match", they now have three or four matches where all of the participants are WWF stars.

TIM WHITEHEAD: USWA out of Memphis on WMC. This show is a throwback to the old days of TV studio wrestling. Never a dull moment.

MATT CREAMER: WCW Saturday, because it's two hours and Gorilla Monsoon is

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: WWF Superstars of Wrestling is the epitome of a polished show that is consistent, well-formatted, and interesting without giving too much away. WCW Saturday Night suffered from giving away too much, diluting everything by never giving a marquee match build-up so it seemed to mean something. It also changed in announcing, format, and direction too often. Third goes to GWF Major League wrestling which actually came close to a tie with WWF Superstars for the same reason that Superstars got number one except it did not feature enough top-level talent to be a must-see program.

BEST MAJOR EVENT OF THE YEAR

Pay-per-views, Clashes, and major dome or outdoor shows of vast importance or prestige are eligible for this award. The winner should be the one perceived as the best quality overall event.

time was had by all.

BRUCE MITCHELL: WrestleWar in Phoenix. It was downhill from there.

ERIC KROL: I enjoyed the November Clash the most. It was everything a special show should be. Second goes to SuperBrawl I and third to WrestleWar.

MARK MADDEN: WCW/Japan Supershow, WrestleWar '91, and Fall Brawl Clash. It is a shame WCW did not learn from the Japan Supershow because it showed that Japanese style can work within a North American context.

READER COMMENTS

ANDY STOWELL: WWF Royal Rumble. The Rumble really set the stage for the great year the WWF had. Every match was good, the title change was a shock and great TV, and the rumble itself helped to re-focus the Federation back to Hogan as the supreme babyface.

MARK COALE: WrestleWar was the best American card of the year. This will definitely not be a threepeat for the Bash, which was one of the worst cards I have ever seen. The latest Clash gets a nod, just because of the tag match.

IAN GOODWIN: Halloween Havoc gets my vote. It featured an annoying, albeit bizarre, opener, and three great matches including a match of the year main event with a clean finish. The only thing that held back WrestleWar and SuperBrawl from topping Havoc was Squeegee Sid.

MATT CREAMER: Gee, I hate to break the longstanding tradition of excellence of the Great American Bash, but is sucked. The TokyoDome

show, on the other hand, was able to bring out WCW's good traits without Dusty Rhodes's booking or Jim Herd's incompetence to screw it up because actual wrestling was the dominant theme.

RYAN SCHURK: SummerSlam '91. Although the main event was not as good as it could have been, the outcome of the three title matches more than made up for it, especially Hart vs. Piper.

JOSEPH PERRY: A nearly five-star gimmick match! Hansen vs. Vader in America! Japanese women! Lucha Libre action in a dark match! Possibly Lex Luger's best match of the year! WrestleWar '91 had it all. So what the hell happened after that, Dusty? I have to admit a certain prejudice to casting my vote for this event, since I attended live and sat in the front row, but no other PPV came close to being as entertaining.

JIM MURPHY: The November Clash of the Champions (at least the last half of it) was as excited as I have been for a wrestling event in the past two years. Steamboat's return, a hot title change with Rude and Sting, a decent light-heavyweight match between Pillman and Badd, Cactus Jack pinning Van Hammer in a decent brawl, and Liger highlights. I had the feeling that I did not know what was going to happen next, and not in a bad way that I used to have during the height of Jim Herd's lunacy, but in the way I used to feel watching the UWF. A very promising sign for WCW.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: WCW's WrestleWar '91 was excellent from top to bottom. No less than six three star-plus matches, an excited live crowd, and Stan Hansen kicking Missy Hyatt out of the locker room. Add an exceptional Spivey vs. Luger match in which both have never looked

1) WCW WRESTLEWAR '91 (28%)

2) WCW SUPERBRAWL I (13%)

3) WCW JAPAN SUPERSHOW (12%)

4) WWF ROYAL RUMBLE (11%)

4) WCW CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS: Nov. 19 (10%)

5) WCW CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS: June 12 (8%)

6-10) WCW Starrcade '90, WWF SummerSlam '91, WWF Halloween Havoc '91, WWF Wrestlemania VII, WWF Survivor Series.

PAST WINNERS:

1990: WCW Great American Bash, WWF Wrestlemania VI, WCW Starrcade '90.
1989: NWA Great American Bash '89, NWA WrestleWar '89, NWA Chi-Town Rumble.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Joel Goodhart's TWA show in August followed by WCW's November Clash. The TWA show was by far the most enjoyable wrestling experience of the year. It had the best U.S. bouts of the year, plus the Fantastics, Cornette, Idol, and Landell taking turns smashing a heavy garage door. A great

better, and a WarGames started by a full throttle five minutes with Pillman and Windham that was just phenomenal, and you have a trip well worth taking to Arizona. The November Clash of the Champions was awesome and gets second. From the Sting angle to Rude's victory to the stunning return of a wrestling demi-god, Ricky Steamboat, this card couldn't have been booked

any better.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: WCW's WrestleWar '91 was a great start to a down year for WCW. WarGames was tremendous from start to finish, especially the beginning with Windham vs. Pillman. Luger vs. Spivey may have been the best match Luger had

all year. The Japanese women's match was a great look at what everyone raves about who sees Japanese tapes. Runners up: November Clash and Royal Rumble. The November Clash for WCW signalled a new beginning in many ways, not to mention the surprise return of Paul E. Dangerously, Rick Rude, and Rick Steamboat.

BEST BABYFACE WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best babyface (good guy/fan favorite) based mainly on ability to garner fan heat in arenas and draw fans to the building, with skill level, real life qualities, and interlew skill not necessarily as important.

1) HULK HOGAN (47%)

2) STING (20%)

3) RANDY SAVAGE (9%)

4) RON SIMMONS (4%)

5) SID JUSTICE (4%)

6-10) Jimmy Hart, Scott Steiner, Jerry Lawler, Roddy Piper, Ultimate Warrior.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Hulk Hogan, Sting, Lex Luger.

1989: Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Sting.

1988: Sting, Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: Randy Savage was able to keep the fans' interest and sympathy with his "romance" with the Lovely Elizabeth. Also, I can vote for him without feeling nauseous. Hulk Hogan does not exactly qualify in this category anymore.

ERIC KROL: Hulk Hogan. This is almost ridiculous when you consider the truth. It is the ultimate oxymoron to say Hogan is the ultimate babyface. Second goes to Sting and third goes to Patriot because he is what a face should be.

MARK MADDEN: Hulk Hogan, Sting, and Randy Savage. That poor pathetic disgrace of a human being, Hulk Hogan (thanks Bruno), is still North America's most popular wrestler, which is a testimony to his babyface persona as well as the utter shallowness and stupidity of most of the people who watch wrestling on this continent.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, and Sting. Let's hope it's curtains for the master of duplicity, better known as Hulk Hogan. If the media spotlight continues to shine

on Hogan, he should fade fast. Since it came right in McMahon's corporate backyard, the *Post* article could really put the kibosh on the Hulkster.

READER COMMENTS

GENE HOLMAN: Since Hogan will probably win this one, and I can't think of anyone else who would meet the qualifications, I will vote for Terry Taylor. Yeah, I know, he was supposed to be a heel, but isn't part of being a face drawing sympathy from fans? Well, when I saw one of the best workers around doing jobs for roidazoids, bookers' sons, and overweight heart attack candidates, I felt more sorry for him than any babyface I can think of. Whatever Taylor did in a former life must have been pretty darn bad to deserve treatment like this.

DAVE PRAZAK: Hulk Hogan, as he has been for the past few years. Second goes to Randy Savage who captured the hearts of all the WWF fans when he reunited with Elizabeth at Wrestlemania and "married" her at SummerSlam.

VINNIE CAROLAN: Since 1982, Hulk Hogan has been over with the general public like he is some kind of rock star and there's yet to be anyone to reach his pedestal. Second has to go to Sting as he still gets pops as when he won the belt in 1990. If WCW knew how to utilize his charisma, Sting might rival Hogan next year for this category.

JIM MURPHY: Hogan still packed 'em in despite being a poor worker, a hypocrite, and a druggie. Whatcha gonna do, Hulk, when replacement runs wild over you?

JOSEPH PERRY: I am almost positive that I will be the only person voting for these guys, but I will say Steve Doll and Bart Sawyer of Portland Pro Wrestling. These guys are good-looking babyfaces who are over huge with females and kids, yet are good enough technical wrestlers to be over with the male adult portion of the audience as well - a delicate balance which is not that easy to achieve, as Marcus Alexander Bagwell might well prove. Sawyer is great considering the short amount of time he has been wrestling, and should be something if his current

Memphis stint goes well and his height does not work against him. Both guys helped contribute to consistent attendance in the territory.

STUART BRYNIEN: Hulk Hogan. Yep, the top face in wrestling is also one of the biggest disappointments in the ring which says a lot about how McMahon sells his product to the masses and how blindly the masses accept it. Hogan earns this honor only because of his feud with Flair, it for no other reason. Let's face it, would another face with a smaller following have provided Flair with as strong an

opponent where it counts at the box office? Randy Savage gets second. His turn was so well-booked, he is hard to deny. The intent was to transform the Macho Man from heel to money-making face, which needless to say was accomplished. Roddy Piper gets third despite having spent most of the year behind the mic. He created a face by turning Virgil against DiBiase and then came between Flair and Hogan, providing the Nature Boy with his first viable



HULK HOGAN

WWF opponent. Great work all around.

MATT CREAMER: Hulk Hogan, Sting, and the Steiners. Seeing as moral character, telling the truth, and respect for the business was not necessary to qualify, Hogan takes it again. Fans continue to buy tickets to watch the pukester oil his body, rip off his shirt, hold his breath, legdrop, pose, and mug. He hasn't changed. He has not had any reason to. Hogan still dominates public perception of wrestling, but in my eyes, the *real* face of the year is Superstar Graham.

ANTHONY SCALA: How could you vote

against him? Even though his actual skill level is mediocre, there is nobody that can get a crowd to pop like Hogan. His entrance is deafening. Runners up: Ultimate Warrior and Randy Savage.

IAN GOODWIN: Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, and Sting. Simmons receives the vote because he was an alternative and a true role model. No matter what you say about him - and you can say a lot - Hulk Hogan was still the top draw. WCW still does not have a babyface as over as Sting.

ANDY STOWELL: Abdullah the Butcher.

He was a heel all year, but he smiled at Eric Bischoff at the Clash. That counts.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: I have to go with Hulk Hogan for first - for probably the last time. Hogan was the babyface of the year according to the description of this category. However ironic it may be, he got cheered the most, sold the most tickets, and appeared on the most merchandise. Second goes to Randy Savage who had the perfect sympathy angle and the most popular female personality ever in wrestling to help him. Third goes to Roddy Piper who continued to be unpredictable and popular.

HEEL WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best heel (bad guy/most hated wrestler) who received the most boos per square inch than any other wrestler and not because their theme music stunk. In-ring skill, out of ring activities, and other such qualities are not important.

1) JAKE "THE SNAKE" ROBERTS (27%)

2) THE UNDERTAKER (21%)

3) RIC FLAIR (19%)

4) SGT. SLAUGHTER (10%)

5) LEX LUGER (6%)

6-10) Cactus Jack, Ted DiBiase, Eddie Gilbert, Larry Zbyszko, Eric Embry.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Ric Flair, Stan Hansen, "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig.

1989: Terry Funk, Lex Luger, Randy Savage.

1988: Ted DiBiase, Barry Windham, Eddie Gilbert.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, and Jake Roberts. Cactus has been great both on the independent scene and for WCW. Flair came on at year's end, but Cactus edges him having had a scrapbook year. Roberts was fantastic in the Savage skit, but his ring work is nothing compared to the first two men.

ERIC KROL: Jake Roberts. Wow! Talk about incredible angles! Any guy that has kids crying is great. Second goes to Undertaker for his mere ring presence and third to Ric Flair.

MARK MADDEN: Undertaker, Jake

Roberts, Rick Rude, and Cactus Jack. It's a great heel role and Mark Calloway deserves credit for playing Undertaker perfectly.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Jake Roberts's performances were truly without redeeming social value. Roberts may have been the only true heel in the business this year. Lex Luger was not bad, but since he was playing himself, that's sort of cheating.

READER COMMENTS

ANDY STOWELL: The Undertaker is as close as they will ever get to the anti-Hogan. Watch the eyes of the kids when he comes out. They believe. Name one other heel who gets that reaction.

VINNIE CAROLAN: The presence of the Undertaker, from his music to his non-selling and his angle with Savage is enough for my first place vote. If the WWF didn't create this character last

November, they would be in deep trouble as they are lacking in the heel department as it is. Without the Undertaker, their top heels would consist of Jake Roberts, Skinner, and only until recently, Ric Flair. When kids literally have nightmares after watching this guy, you know that he is doing something right with his gimmick. Second vote goes to Ric Flair for the great angle with Piper and McMahon. The last time Flair was involved in a good angle was in

Tennessee during 1989 and he had help with that one. This time he carried the angle virtually by himself and honestly I don't think anyone else could have done a better job in the same situation. Mr. Perfect will get my third place vote since he wrestled for most of the year and has the smart-ass attitude down to a tee.

RHONDA CLARK: Jake Roberts and Cactus Jack. I believe this category ends up in a tie. Roberts has turned from a top face to the most hated man in the promotion. The series with the Warrior and now with Savage is hot. Cactus is the best brawler in the business and his wild lifestyle is great for his heel persona.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Even in only a few months, Jake Roberts has shown why he was a total waste as a babyface. He is scary. A throwback to what heels like John Tolos, Freddie Blassie, and Terry Funk used to portray. Believability.



JAKE "THE SNAKE" ROBERTS: HEEL OF THE YEAR

IAN GOODWIN: Jake Roberts, Lex Luger, and Abdullah the Butcher. Jake Roberts has been rejuvenated as a psycho heel. Luger has been great as an arrogant superheel. After all these years, Abby is still scaring a lot of people.

ANTHONY SCALA: Sgt. Slaughter has proven that he could sink below the scum of the earth exploiting a war to make a buck. People



UNDERTAKER: #2 HEEL OF THE YEAR

died in this war and he participates in an angle for it? Anyway, he drew crowds, even if it was only to see him get his head taken off.

MARC WARZECHA: Lex Luger, Undertaker, and Jake Roberts. No matter how good of a heel Flair can be, he is probably cheered just as much and in my opinion, that knocks him out of this category.

MATT CREAMER: For every 30 or so really stupid WWF gimmick ideas, there usually is one really great one. The Undertaker is their best gimmicks since the Million Dollar Man. Let's face it, Repoman and I.R.S. agents don't exactly inspire fear and hatred in the hearts of the fans. But a man with a death fetish is truly a kick-ass character. He is menacing, he can be a great wrestler (although he rarely is), and he sells



SGT. SLAUGHTER: #4 HEEL

tickets. Flair is runner up, but he sells tickets as a wrestler, not as a heel.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Undertaker. This guy is over bigtime. Just look at the expressions on people's faces when he enters the ring.

DAN LENNARD: A heel is supposed to be hated. I did not hate anyone more than Sgt. Slaughter in 1991, and not just because of his lousy interviews and pathetic ring work.

STUART BRYNIEN: Jake Roberts, Ted DiBiase, and Larry Zbyszko. Roberts started out as a face, but once he turned, watch out! He gave the best heel interviews of the year. DiBiase is certainly the most entertaining heel in the WWF ever since he arrived. Paired now with Sherri, who can bring out the best in just about anyone, he is simply terrific. And, not incidentally, he might just be the best worker Vince has, as well. He can wrestle, he can take bumps, and he will do the occasional job. If McMahon does not thank his lucky stars every night that he has him, he ought to be ashamed of himself. Zbyszko is squat, ugly, and not particularly well-built, but he is the very model of the old-time villain, performing one heinous act on his opponents after another, and then letting everyone know about it when he is done. What's more, I can't remember when he *wasn't* a heel, which in itself is a point in his favor.

RYAN SCHURK: Ric Flair. He has caused tremendous controversy anywhere he has been. The angle with him, Hogan, and the Undertaker was fabulous. However, his performance in the Survivor Series was disappointing.

ROSS LAIDLAW: Jake Roberts needed his turn to face a couple of years ago because now people can really appreciate his recent return to heel status. He is methodical and sadistic... and convincing.

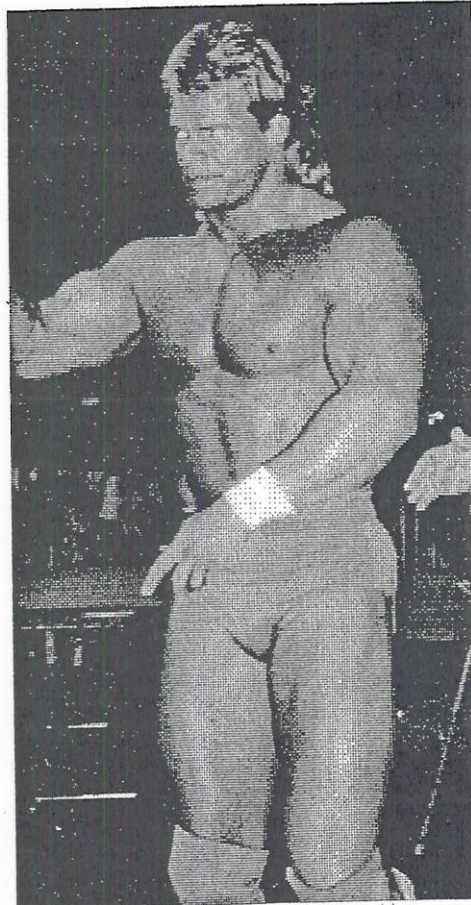
JOSEPH PERRY: Flair's debut interview on Prime Time was nothing short of classic, and his cocky persona has pissed off just about every casual WWF fan I have heard. The kids at the school where I teach absolutely hate him, which is just what McMahon wants.

JIM MURPHY: A tie: The Undertaker was probably the most "over" heel and a very good gimmick, but no one epitomized heel this year better than Cactus Jack - with or without Abdullah. Cactus is someone WCW should build around for the future, yet he could have fit in very nicely with Gary Hart's Army back in the early days of my wrestling fandom. Cactus is a consummate heel.

GENE HOLMAN: Bill Watts, for his unwanted, uninvited wrongheaded views on race

relations. Just because a guy is a successful wrestling promoter does not mean he can mouth off about something he is obviously unqualified to speak about. Hey, after his sentiments in the Torch Annual IV, I wanted some babyface to get him in the ring and shut him up.

JEFF BENSON: No question whatsoever, Jake "The Snake" Roberts. The fact that his character has gotten no heat from fans and his feud with Savage has bombed says nothing



LEX LUGER: #5 HEEL

negative about Roberts's work as a heel, it shows what idiots WWF fans are. Roberts is absolutely perfect in his part and the WWF has wasted their best heel for years.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

The best heel this year was Jake Roberts. Everyone who plans to be involved in wrestling, be it as a wrestler of booker or vice president, should study tapes of Roberts and learn how to be sure you do not get cheered "because you're cool". This guy's act is down to a tee. Second goes to the Undertaker who was cheered quite a bit near the end of the year, but still is the epitome of a heel character: death. Third goes to Cactus Jack, who was not a traditional heel in evoking fear, but a heel whom you feared for. He was brutal enough to boo, but original enough to admire.

WORST WORKER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the worst wrestler of the year, the person who worked for a major promotion and got a push but was an embarrassment and a disgrace to the sport he represented.

1) VAN HAMMER (21%)

2) BILL KAZMAIER (15%)

3) OZ (16%)

4) SID JUSTICE (9%)

5) EL GIGANTE (9%)

6-10) Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior, P.N. News, Col. Mustafa, Hacksaw Duggan.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Junkyard Dog, Ultimate Warrior, Night Stalker

1989: Andre the Giant, Ultimate Warrior, Zeus

1988: Andre the Giant, Ultimate Warrior, Junkyard Dog

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

MARK MADDEN: Todd Champion, P.N. News, and Van Hammer in WCW. Warlord, Hercules, and Greg Valentine in the WWF. I originally was going to vote for Champion, News, and Hammer, but then I realized that those three on their worst days are more watchable than all but a handful of WWF guys. Warlord is the worst because he just cannot do anything. Hercules is second-worst because he just does not try to do anything, and Valentine is third-worst because... well, just because.

ERIC KROL: Sid Justice, Warlord, and Oz. Now there's a triumvirate from hell.

BRUCE MITCHELL: British Bulldog turned his back on his talent for no discernible reason. Couldn't he make at least as much money in Japan with a decent workrate? Instead, he arrogantly bored fans with his slow motion, blown-up antics. Sid Justice did the fans a favor and stayed hurt most of the year.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Michael Hayes, P.N. News, and Warlord. It would be too easy to choose an unproven commodity like Hammer or News since they have been put in a position that forces them to expose what they do not know about working. Let us pick a deserving veteran who has no excuse, once had all the skills, and who should know better: Michael "P.S." Hayes.

READER COMMENTS

RHONDA CLARK: Sgt. Slaughter. They pushed him in his war against Hogan and he showed no skill and now they are pushing him once more with partner Hacksaw Duggan.

VINNIE CAROLAN: Let's see. It looks like WCW has more to offer than the WWF this year. No matter how bad Van Hammer and Oz are, at least they display a little agility when they wrestle which is more than I can say for El Gigante. The guy cannot work, the guy cannot sell, and the guy only knows three moves. Yeah, it is only his second year in the biz, but how long have Hammer and Oz been in the biz? Sorry, but the guy just plain stinks.

JEFF COHEN: Sid Justice is the pits. Everything wrong with this business is typified by him. He proves there is no justice.

DAVE FREY: El "I Want da' Belt" Gigante. Clearly the front-runner, but he does have a lot of company. This is the hardest category to choose. You've got Greg Valentine, P.N. News, Van Hammer, British Bulldog...

PAUL HANLIN JR.: Despite the Undertaker's best efforts Nov. 28 in Detroit, no one stunk out a joint more than Van Hammer. Can you imagine him in the main event of a card promoted by Herb Abrams with Ed Whalen of America doing play-by-play?

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Oz is horrible. Kazmaier is pathetic. But Todd Champion actually got a belt! Never has there been a time when Todd the Clod didn't look completely lost when he was in the ring.

STEVE FISCHER: The Warlord has been in wrestling for six years, yet he does not know six wrestling moves. He is the ultimate in the McMahon pumped-up, no ability world of stiffs.

DAVE PRAZAK: Van Hammer. That speaks for itself. Calling him "the most put over no-talent in wrestling" is perfectly worded. Bill Kazmaier gets second. He showed no wrestling skill at all this year. Virgil is just a glorified boxer.

JOSEPH PERRY: Gee, there are so many to choose from this year. It's almost unfair to give this to one person when so many deserve it. So as not to vote for the most obvious I will cast a vote for Tugboat/Typhoon so he will not feel left out.

RYAN SCHURK: Hacksaw Jim Duggan. His one-on-one matches against Undertaker have been terrible and the tag matches with Duggan & Savage vs. The Undertaker & Jake "The Snake" Roberts have been even worse.

STU BRYNIEN: The Undertaker. I know he has been hog-tied by some awfully restrictive booking, but the fact remains that when he is at his zombie-like best, he is also - as far as wrestling goes - at his worst. And when he is in there with the Hulk, shovel dirt o'er the both of 'em, Fred. They ain't movin'.



VAN HAMMER: WORST WORKER

TIM WHITEHEAD: El Gigante. This was a close call between Sid Justice, Bill Kazmaier, and El Gigante. I give it to Gigante because he received world title shots against Ric Flair early in the year. The only move Gigante knows is to say, "I want da' belt" (and he could use some work on that.)

MATT CREAMER: The Jim Herd instant wrestler formula: 1) Find a big green stiff, 2) pump him full of steroids, 3) and push him as if he were the second coming. Bill Kazmaier appears to fit this formula. He can't wrestle, he can barely move, and his interviews are pathetic. Nobody could care less about him. His chemical matter is taking up precious space on an overcrowded planet.

ELYSE ZOIS: Van Hammer looks like he doesn't know one end of a guitar from the other and he still shows more talent for music than wrestling.

ANTHONY SCALA: Sid Justice. He was brought into the WWF after doing a job in his final WCW match, gets into a series of chokehold contests with Undertaker, a horrible series with Jake Roberts, and then gets injured. He deserves a push, all right. A push right out the door.

IAN GOODWIN: Squeegie Sid wins over El Gigante because he has been in the business for five years. He was a no-selling, untalented, unprofessional, steroid-soaked, squeegie-swinging whimp who is an insult to all hardworking wrestlers. The same goes for Roddy Piper as well. Both should quit the business and begin a new career of cleaning

windshields.

DON SMITH: I wish El Gigante well. He seems like a nice guy, and I want him to make it, but I cringe every time I see him in the ring. While he appeared in a number of main events in 1991, he had no timing and no moves. I don't know what will happen to his career, but the future does not look bright. You just cannot have a man that big as an undercard jobber, and you cannot have a man that big as a main event winner, especially if he has no skill whatsoever. In the past, Andre the Giant, who did have some skills, would travel from promotion to promotion, thereby avoiding the aforementioned problems. Today, no such options exist.

DAN LENNARD: Sgt. Slaughter. For someone who was supposed to be their federation's leading heel, Sgt. Slaughter was embarrassingly bad in 1991.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: El Gigante is in pro wrestling because of his size, not his interview ability or because of any level of competence in the ring. That he got pushed in world title matches against Ric Flair is a real embarrassment to anyone involved in that decision. There is no believability to his matches. Second goes to Typhoon who shows no regard for entertaining the fans while in the ring. Third goes to Sid Justice, whom I believe is worse than Van Hammer. Hammer was able to be carried to a quality match by Cactus Jack. The thought of Justice being carried to a quality match is pretty far-fetched. His proneness to injury, huge push, and total lack in apparent to desire to better his craft makes him another perfect example of what is wrong with what promoters look for in main event wrestlers. Honorable mention to Bill Kazmaier, Col. Mustafa, and Hacksaw Duggan.

MOST EMBARRASSING WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the wrestler who makes you most embarrassed to be a wrestling fan.

**1) VAN HAMMER
(24%)**

2) P.N. NEWS (19%)

3) OZ (11%)

**4) THE BUSHWACKERS
(11%)**

5) HULK HOGAN (5%)

6-10) Bill Kazmaier, Dusty Rhodes, El Gigante, "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan, Col. Mustafa

**PREVIOUS WINNERS
New Category**

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: We're off to see the Wizard, the... Poor Curtis Thompson in that Texaco Fireman's hat was awful, too. The guy in Global who pointed at an opponent's leg and caused a cramp - Rasta the Voo-Doo Mon - made me turn the channel every time.

MARK MADDEN: Hulk Hogan, P.N. News, and Oz. When I try to explain to people what Hulk Hogan is really like and they don't believe me because McMahon and Hogan have them so brainwashed, then I am truly chagrined to be a regular follower of a business/sport so sleazy that it can deceive an entire continent and

get away with it because "it's only wrestling".

CHRIS ZAVISA: The Bushwackers, P.N. News, and Hulk Hogan. It is nearly impossible to fathom how two wrestlers who used to work Onita-style blood brawls could be transformed into head-licking clowns loved by eight year old rug rats. The Bushwackers make P.N. News look like a dignified British aristocrat.

ERIC KROL: Oz. Dave Meltzer put it best. While watching SuperBrawl live, the Oz intro was going on. He wrote something to the effect of this: "It's times like this that I have a hard time rationalizing to myself why I'm a wrestling fan."

READER COMMENTS

DAN LENNARD: Sgt. Slaughter, Oz, and Diamond Studd. To think, they named a wrestler as bad as Kevin Nash after my country. The money they wasted on Oz could have been put to better use trying to keep Flair in WCW.

ANDY STOWELL: P.N. News. Dressing P.N. News in florescent orange was the single most disgusting event of the year. Somebody seriously should have taught this doughboy the English language before they tried to get him to talk. I also will not mention that this is the most racially offensive stereotype of all time.

IAN GOODWIN: El Gigante, Sid Justice, and the Patriots. El Gigante is an embarrassing waste who will probably never get any better. The Squeegie Sissy is the complete opposite of Arn Anderson - utterly unprofessional.



P.N. NEWS

Consisting of one guy who sucks and another who was dressed like a fireman, the Patriots either made me embarrassed or laugh.

EDDIE GOLDMAN: Hulk Hogan. No one else even comes close. I have just seen the "Inside Edition" show and heard Superstar



HACKSAW DUGGAN

Graham's and Dr. D's elaborations on John Arezzi's show. This man is a disgrace, pure and simple. He makes all of wrestling look bad to those who are not fans, since the media still use him as a symbol of the whole business. Unfortunately, he may drag down the whole sport for a while before it can recover.

ANTHONY SCALA: Van Hammer. A heavy metal, guitar-swinging Sammy Hagar look-a-like, muscle monster with lights on his boots. This guy does not help when I am trying to convince people that wrestling is a great sport.

MATT CREAMER: Jim Duggan, Hulk Hogan, and P.N. News. I have a friend who really hates pro wrestling (don't we all). What's worse, he constantly reminds me what a fool I am for watching it. This established, every time I watch wrestling with him in the room, as if by some mystical force, there stands Hacksaw Duggan in all his snot-dripping, cross-eyed, board-waving, xenophobic glory. Now you tell me how the hell I'm supposed to defend myself.

MIKE O'BRIEN: Roddy Piper is first. His non-selling to devastating looking maneuvers such as Flair's chops and less than stiff style expose the business. Most everyone knows wrestling is fake, but he should at least try to work so that it is not obvious that he is missing moves. Hulk Hogan's denial of the use of steroids along with his lazy, no-bump style hurts the business where he is the U.S.'s most

recognizable wrestler. El Gigante still does not seem as if he has a clue about what to do in the ring. There is not a wrestler alive who can carry him to a good match.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Van Hammer. He's improving a little, but he still embarrasses me. There is just something about his headbanger gimmick, combined with his ring work and the push he got from the WCW brass, that makes me want to change channels really fast.

JIM MUPRHY: The Bushwackers, Oz, the Patriots, and Hacksaw Duggan are all disgraces to the sport. "Honorable" mention: Kerry Von Erich for having the absolute worst interviews of anyone in pro wrestling. The diametric opposite of Ric Flair and Arn Anderson on the stick.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: I was ready to jump into the ring at the Forum in November just to show everybody what a stiff Bill Kazmaier is in the ring. I would have walked out on the match if I was Luger. Talk all you want about his weightlifting records, but they don't mean a damn thing when you don't know the first thing about wrestling.

GENE HOLMAN: P.N. News. As a fan of both rap and wrestling, I think that this gimmick could work. If the person portraying the character could do one or the other. P.N. News should find some job more suited to his talents, whatever they are. We know what they aren't.

PAUL HANLIN: Also the most pathetic, two-faced, arrogant, and irresponsible man who earns his living in the ring. Ever. Yes, we have come not to praise the Right Guard man who paints in his spare time, but to bury him. The stench Hulk Hogan and Hogan alone has unleashed, all the deodorant in the world cannot cover up.

MARK COALE: Of all of Vince's stupid gimmicks, Barry Darsow's Repoman is just plain stupid. When you take in the entire year, Dusty still belongs, even though now he is behind the scenes. One must remember this year's Rumble and Virgil's brief tenure as color commentator. Paul Neu is an embarrassment to both wrestling and rap.

VINNIE CAROLAN: El Gigante and I.R.S. are annoying and Sgt. Slaughter as champion was almost too much to take. But the most embarrassing and disconcerting occurrence to take place in wrestling during 1991 was Virgil Runnels bringing his infamous "Dusty finish" to the great country of Japan. Where in the world does he get off trying to disgrace American wrestling in, of all places, Japan? He actually had the audacity to go to Japan, pull a cheap screw-job in the main event, and play it off like it

was just another wrestling angle. I am sorry, but I will go through a whole year of Van Hammer before I would see that B.S. again, especially in the wrestling capitol of the world, Japan. It is a good thing for WCW that New Japan is speaking with them or the future would not be so great for WCW. Actually, they do not even use their ties with the Japanese effectively so I really wonder if it would make a difference.

BOB FERETTI: Every wrestling fan at some point has to rationalize why they are a fan and from this rationalization there comes justifiable reasons and then Fire Breaker Chip appears on the screen and you are back to square one. P.N. News and Oz are runners-up.

CARLIE GILL: Bill Kazmaier runs away with this one. Since when do tests of unnatural strength equate to wrestling ability? What a waste of time he was and what an embarrassment! Warlord is embarrassing to look at. Finally, Hulk Hogan made me ashamed to be a fan by exploiting the war, lying about steroid abuse and worst of all, in my opinion, using Jesus Christ to promote himself. He is a complete and utter phony.

RHONDA CLARK: Van Hammer. What a joke. He may have the looks, but he has no wrestling skills and maybe he will improve, but I think he is a true embarrassment to the sport.



BUSHWACKER LUKE... OR IS IT BUTCH?

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

Hacksaw Duggan, P.N. News, and Van Hammer are the top three. Duggan's physique and total lack of respect for the sport he represents locks him for this award. P.N. News should respectfully step down from his lofty position in WCW and learn to rap. Then he's welcome to return to rapping in the ring so, he can at least embarrass every wrestling fan with an on-beat rap. Van Hammer's rock gimmick is just unnecessary. Some day, when promoters start hiring and pushing talented athletes who can put together an exciting wrestling match, maybe some young athletes will begin to enter pro wrestling again.

INDEPENDENT WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the wrestler who earned a reputation for providing great action but for one reason or another was not in one of the major groups for part of the year, but wrestled enough independently to earn respect. Independent matches are those outside of the WWF, WCW, and GWF.

1) LIGHTNING KID (26%)

2) CACTUS JACK (22%)

3) EDDIE GILBERT (18%)

4) TERRY FUNK (8%)

5) "SWEET" STAN LANE (5%)

6-10) Scott Anthony, Jerry Lynn, Black Harts, Steve Williams, Johnny Hotbody.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Ricky Rice, Terry Funk, Cactus Jack

1989: Ricky Rice, Jerry Lawler, Scotty "The Body" Anthony

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

BRUCE MITCHELL: Eddie Gilbert was the most entertaining on the mic and best in the ring of these guys. Agent Orange in the VWA (called Bruce Mitchell while doing jobs in the WWF) was my personal favorite, for some reason.

ERIC KROL: Lightning Kid is the best bet here. I mean, who else. Second goes to Jerry Lawler. Why not?

CHRIS ZAVISA: Lightning Kid, Cactus Jack, and Eddie Gilbert. Kid certainly sparked a great deal of interest in the activities of a bar in Minnesota. He also made at least a couple of Pedicino's shows worth watching. Cactus worked the best matches on the indie circuit, but was in the bigs for the last third of the year, so he only gets the second spot.

MARK MADDEN: Cactus Jack, Eddie Gilbert, and Scotty Anthony. Cactus gets number one because he got a job with WCW based on his outstanding indie work, but Eddie and Scotty should have big-league jobs, too.

READER COMMENTS

RHONDA CLARK: Jerry Lawler. Although he took off some of 1991, he is still the

most popular wrestler in the Mid-South area. His matches always bring fans to the arenas.

CARLIE GILL: Eddie Gilbert, Terry Gordy, and Stan Lane. Gilbert gets a runner up position for his great matches against Cactus and Lawler. Gordy didn't do much independent work in the U.S., but when he did, it makes you wonder when WCW and the WWF will stop being so short-sighted and sign him up for a mega-push. Stan Lane gets the top spot for not only giving fans good matches, but for his willingness to sell for lesser known guys. He is a pro in every sense of the word.

BOB FERRETTI: Cactus Jack's matches with Eddie Gilbert sealed this award for him in my opinion. Gilbert, logically, then gets the runner-up spot with J.T. Smith of the TWA third.

GENE HOLMAN: Axl Rotten. I saw him on a local wrestling show and even though he was the heaviest guy on the show, he was at least three times faster than any of his peers and not a bad worker besides. With that in mind, and having listened to him several times on a local radio show, and cracking up laughing at whatever he said, I have to vote for him.

DAN LENNARD: Lightning Kid will go places if he doesn't kill himself first with his crazy flying moves.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Cactus Jack can make you suspend your disbelief quickly. Anybody who saw any of the Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert bloodfests can attest to this. What a throwback to the Golden Age of Wrestling. Lightning Kid gets third.

MARIE DALZELL: The Billion Dollar Babies. They're the IWCCW Tag Champs and even though I don't think they could compete with the LOD, Steiners, or any other major

teams, they're still a pretty good team. It does not hurt that they have a great manager like Kevin "The Truth" Casey.

JOSEPH PERRY: Global gave the Lightning Kid a well-deserved push. Kid is one of the most exciting American wrestlers going.

STEVE SIMS: Lightning Kid, Jerry Lynn, and K.C. Knight. Kid and Lynn's performances speak for themselves. Knight is the Windy City Wrestling Middleweight Champion and far and away their best worker and a real sleeper of a prospect.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Stan Lane. Lane wrestled briefly in the GWF, but spend most of the year in the indies. He deserves to be back in the majors.

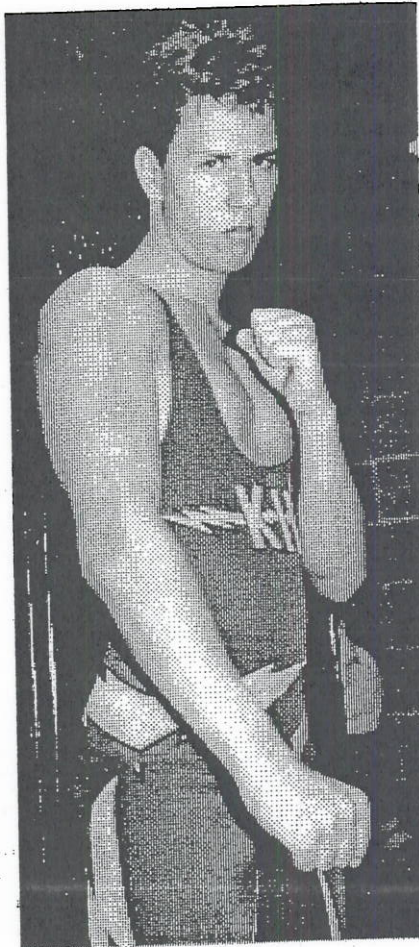
MATT CREAMER: Buddy Landell would have been the hands down winner of this award if he showed up sometimes.

ANDY STOWELL: Dr. Mark Curtis (Brian Hildebrand). I'm making a personal pledge to buy a ticket to every single house show

that Hildebrand appears on, if just one of the big offices would give him a job. Seriously, someone this talented should not be hidden in bars and gymnasiums.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller:

Eddie Gilbert gets my first pick. He wrestled more regularly than either Cactus Jack or Lightning Kid in the independent ranks. Gilbert never sluffs off, is dedicated to this business, and is looked at as the secondary part of the Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert wars while being 50 percent of what made those matches tick. Cactus Jack gets second for being the highlight of many independent cards before he joined WCW. Third place goes to Lightning Kid who has gotten so many other honors on previous pages and not nearly enough respect from this business.



LIGHTNING KID

BRAWLER OF THE YEAR

This award goes to the best brawler of the year no matter what his impact was or where in the United States and Canada he wrestled.

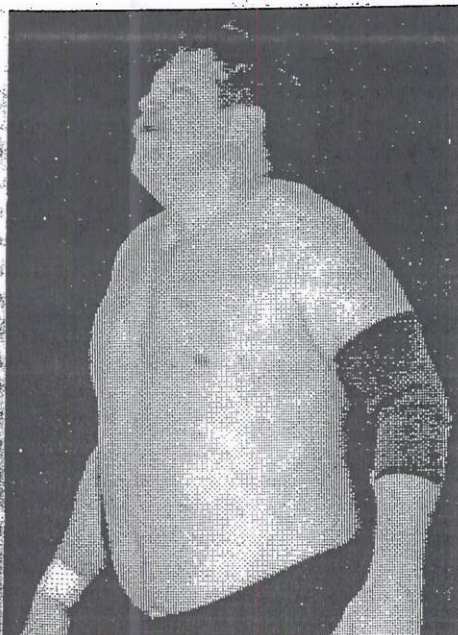
- 1) CACTUS JACK (51%)
- 2) EDDIE GILBERT (11%)
- 3) STAN HANSEN (10%)
- 4) ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER (10%)
- 5) TERRY GORDY (4%)
- 6-10) Ron Simmons, Steve Williams, Arn Anderson, Roddy Piper, Barry Windham

PREVIOUS WINNERS
New Category

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

CHRIS ZAVISA: Cactus Jack, Eddie Gilbert, and Arn Anderson. Cactus is one of the finest brawlers this country has produced since the late, great Frank Bruiser Brody. It is amazing how he gets the maximum mileage from pieces of architectural detail that most other wrestlers never even see. Brody was great since he was always to whip somebody's body from one end of the arena to the other. In Cactus's case, he is always thinking of more spectacular ways to get his own butt kicked in.

BRUCE MITCHELL: Cactus Jack. Nuff



STAN HANSEN: #3 Brawler

said.

ERIC KROL: Cactus Jack was phenomenal this year, from the Philly matches with Gilbert to the antics with (Dear) Abby, Cacti did not let us down when he got his big chance. Abby is a cinch for the award next year from his classic waving and smiling at Sting during BattleBowl.

MARK MADDEN: Cactus Jack and Eddie Gilbert. Cactus and Eddie cornered the market on brawling in this country when they staged their gory tripleheaders on a TWA card in Philly. Betcha even Atsushi Onita got a little nauseous when he watched tapes of that carnage.

READER COMMENTS

DAN LENNARD: Ron Simmons, Stan Hansen, and Big Van Vader. Simmons came across as a legit, tough brawler, particularly in his match with Butch Reed at SuperBrawl and as part of Doom against Windham & Anderson at Starrcade '90.

ADAM KAINE: Cactus Jack really reminds me of George "The Animal" Steele. They both made their characters so believable you could never picture these two driving cars or going to PTA meetings. Jack has to be wearing some pads with some of the risky leaps from the apron. Cactus, along with Rude, are the only two major American stars that I have not seen in person. WCW has not been in Detroit for a year and a half. Please, WCW, us Detroiters are starving for some real action.

ANTHONY SCALA: Cactus Jack. Does this guy value his body? Those elbows off the apron are incredible.

MATT CREAMER: Every year I wonder if and when Abdullah the Butcher is ever going to retire. And every year, he does something to make me glad he has not. As long as his heart is able to stand it, Abby will be carving up foreheads, smashing people with chairs, and juicing heavy as only he can. I would not be a bit surprised to see him around ten years from now.

TIM WHITEHEAD: Any one of Cactus's three matches against Eddie Gilbert in that one night would be enough to clinch this one.

STUART BRYNIEN: Cactus Jack.



CACTUS JACK: BRAWLER OF THE YEAR

Partially because he is more than just a brawler. How many guys in this category are also flyers? Abdullah the Butcher. It may be a little hard to explain to someone watching wrestling for the very first time, but let's face it: there's no telling what havoc the bra-less one will cause in the ring, in the locker room, and in the stands. It is not for nothing that he has become a major favorite among fans who like to see juice.

STEVE SIMS: Cactus Jack and Eddie Gilbert were even for their TWA work, but Cactus continued it in WCW whereas Gilbert has been more traditional int eh GWF. Arn Anderson gets third and beats out Lawler because he makes it seem so real.

JOSEPH PERRY: Cactus! Cactus! Cactus! There is no question about it this year. This guy makes it so obvious that he is in it for the love of the sport. Who else would take an ungimmicked bottle to the head, get himself legit wrapped up in barbed wire and consistently take maniacal bumps in 1991?

MARK COALE: Cactus Jack is the best brawler in the United States. His bumps at the September Clash were amazing, and this is as good a place as any to mention having to carry Van Hammer. Gilbert and Jack combined for some amazing bouts, all on one card in Philadelphia. Terry Funk did not do too much this year, but this could be a lifetime achievement award.

RHONDA CLARK: Cactus Jack gets my vote because he risks it all for the fans and for his own, I believe. He has had a big impact on WCW and wrestling.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Stan Hansen did not work enough in the States which leaves Eddie Gilbert first and Cactus Jack second. A distant third goes to Barry Windham who started out the balloting period with a hot tag match at Starrcade '90.

BEST AERIAL WRESTLER

This award goes to the wrestler who flies through the air, off the ropes, and out of the ring better and more often than anyone else.

- 1) JUSHIN "THUNDER" LIGER (25%)
- 2) "FLYIN'" BRIAN PILLMAN (20%)
- 3) LIGHTNING KID (16%)
- 4) "BEAUTIFUL" BOBBY EATON (14%)
- 5) "ROCKET" OWEN HART (9%)
- 6-10) Cactus Jack, Shawn Michaels, Marty Janetty, Jerry Lynn, Rick Steamboat

PREVIOUS WINNERS
New Category

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

MARK MADDEN: Lightning Kid, Brian Pillman, and Bobby Eaton. Kid clinched this when he flew onto the GlobalDome interview platform to blast Jerry Lynn in the GWF's fledging days. For sheer spectacularity, no one touches the Kid, at least not in North America. Pillman is a close second since his body tone combines with his aerial maneuvers to make his style of flying seem equal parts violence and acrobatics, which is as it should be in pro wrestling.

ERIC KROL: Lightning Kid for the 178 foot jump onto Jerry Lynn. Second goes to Air Pillman.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Brian Pillman, Lightning Kid, and J.T. Smith. Nobody in this country flies the way the Japanese and Mexicans do. Pillman is the best at combining good wrestling with an occasional high risk aerial spot. It is obvious that Lightning Kid wants to be known as a great flyer and he certainly is off to a good take off. One of Goodhart's rookies, J.T. Smith, is a fantastic flyer who needs more national exposure and is more than deserving of it.

BRUCE MITCHELL: The underrated Brian Pillman was the best at this style.

Lightning Kid was second.

READER COMMENTS

RHONDA CLARK: Bobby Eaton. It doesn't get any better, he is an exceptional wrestler and one of the best aerial wrestlers in the business. Jushin Liger, Cactus Jack, and Brad Armstrong are also greats in this category.

BOB FERRETTI: I give the nod to Lightning Kid. His leap onto Jerry Lynn during the GWF Light Heavyweight Title finals was incredible. Brian Pillman and Bobby Eaton are the runners-up.

VINNIE CAROLAN: Nobody jumps and even flies higher than the Japanese great, Jushin Liger. I give Great Muta second place this year because he's spent more time in the air than on the ground. Although I may be a bit off-base with this, I am giving Cactus Jack the third place vote because just about all of his fantastic bumps consisted of him flying all around the arenas. Hey, it is one way to go about winning the award I guess.

MARK COALE: Again, Bobby Eaton is the American for this award, but still pales in comparison to Jushin Liger or Great Muta. I am looking forward to seeing Pillman wrestle Liger. Owen Hart is the best North American aerial wrestler, but look where he spends most of his time.

KEVIN VAN DYKE: Warlord. Even in squashes, the guy's unbelievable. El Gigante. His moonsault at Halloween Havoc stole the show. Curly Mo. He's still a little green. I project him to be number one next year.

GENE HOLMAN: Cactus Jack. His out o ring elbow dive onto Sting back at Fall Brawl cinched this, although everything he has done since has been more than worthy of recognition.

MARIE DALZELL: Cactus Jack doesn't care who he jumps on or where he lands. I am amazed he has not seriously hurt himself.

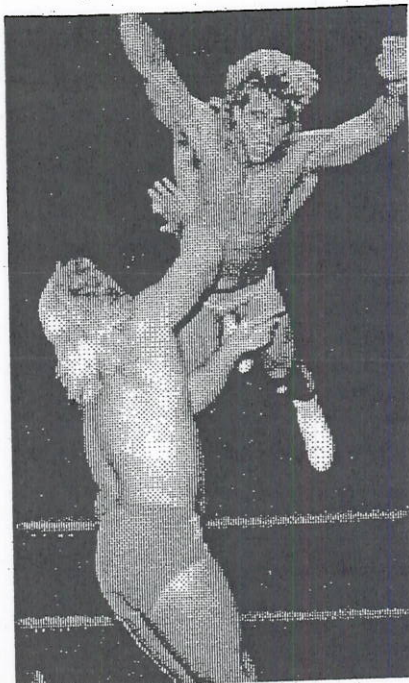
JOSEPH PERRY: Jushin Liger. Despite nothing close to a huge push in New Japan this year, Liger has not lost a bit of his work ethic, excitement, or skill. He is simply, as has been attested to numerous times by just about everybody, consistently one of the greatest.

STEVE SIMS: Lightning Kid has some incredible individual spots, but I saw Pillman do more aerial spots and do them more frequently during a match, so I give Pillman first. Sean Michaels gets third as he shines on pay-per-views.

STUART BRYNIEN: Cactus Jack gets my vote here for the same reason he won my vote in the previous category. How many wrestlers in this category are long-haired brawlers who approach 300 pounds? Risks his neck on some moves that are just plain unbelievable for someone who weighs so much. Seems positively suicidal at times, yet versatile enough to keep it strictly on the mat. Jushin Liger gets second and Lightning Kid gets

third. Kid seems as thin and gangly as a dancer at times, yet is willing to take such high-imp[act bumps that you wonder how his fragile-looking fame could possibly survive them.

FINAL THOUGHTS by Wade Keller: Jushin Liger is far and away the best flyer who wrestled in the United States. Even though the number of matches he had in the States was minimal, and that was enough to disqualify Stan Hansen from brawler of the year, there is no one close enough to Liger to justify the award. Lightning Kid took enough chances with new moves to capture second place. Sean Michaels gets third as he and Janetty flew all over the ring whenever given the opportunity. Honorable mention to Brian Pillman who, with the light heavyweight division, hopefully will have the opportunity to fly a little more and get squashed fewer times against Sid Justice types in 1992. Marty Janetty and Jerry Lynn also deserve mention, Lynn as a future super flyer and Janetty, who was simply overshadowed by Michaels throughout most of 1991.



FLYIN' BRIAN PILLMAN: #2 AERIAL

JAPANESE WRESTLING AWARDS

The following awards are based on action in Japan but can include wrestlers of any nationality or citizenship.

JAPANESE WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

- 1) **JUSHIN LIGER (31%)**
- 2) **JUMBO TSURUTA (26%)**
- 3) **KENTA KOBASHI (12%)**
- 4) **KEIJI MUTOH (10%)**
- 5) **HIROSHI HASE (8%)**
- 6-10) Atsushi Onita, Masa Chono, Mitsuhiro Misawa, Genichiro Tenryu.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: *Jushin Liger, Keiji Mutoh, Jumbo Tsuruta*

1989: *Akira Maeda, Genichiro Tenryu, Jushin Liger*



JUSHIN LIGER: JAPANESE WRESTLER OF THE YEAR (By Brian Hildebrand)

CHRIS ZAVISA: Jumbo Tsuruta, Bull Nakano, and Atsushi Onita. Tsuruta is the consummate professional. A highly skilled veteran who provides a valuable leadership to the next generation while forcing them and himself to higher levels of athletic excellence and constant improvement. Tsuruta is a solid anchor for the most successful promotion in the world.

STEVE SIMS: Tsuruta is way ahead of everyone else. Muto, along with his alter ego Muta, took over at the top rung at New Japan this year. Nakano had great matches and led the promotion to a fine year.

JOSEPH PERRY: Hiroshi Hase and Jumbo Tsuruta had a hell of a year, as did many others, but I give the nod to Kenta Kobashi. He worked his butt off this year, whether it was selling like crazy for the likes of Jumbo or Stan Hansen or Steve Williams or doing spectacular offensive moves.

PAUL HANLIN JR.: The best in Japan and the best on Earth: Jumbo Tsuruta. He really kicked it into gear in 1991 as front man of the best men's promotion going today. Okay, Chris Zavisa convinced me. Second place goes to Atsushi Onita. When it came time for FMW's biggest card of the year, it drew more paid attendance than the mighty SWS did with all their foreign big guns last March at the TokyoDome. Akira Hokuto, who gets third, is far better than Onita, but she has a better supporting cast than Onita. With FMW, it is Onita and then everyone else.

VINNIE CAROLAN: Jumbo Tsuruta has this wrapped up. Consistency is the key here and there is absolutely no wrestler who has been more valuable to his company on a nightly basis than Tsuruta.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Jushin Liger is a never ending highlight reel. His constant innovation in the ring serves as a standard and model for countless other wrestlers. Even in a year where New Japan totally misused this thoroughbred, he still lead the pack. Hase is exceptional in every aspect of his wrestling and it is about time he gets pushed out of tag team wrestling and be given the same singles push as Muto, Chono, and Hashimoto. You will never see a mediocre performance from this man. Third goes to Kenta Kobashi, who showed more than Tsuruta, Kawada, and Misawa and deserves pinfalls over all three men. His moonsault is breathtaking.

ANDY STOWELL: Jumbo Tsuruta is the greatest living wrestler on the face of the planet. Bar none. He is also the most important wrestler in the world. The difference between Tsuruta and Flair is that Flair popped some 10,000 seat houses when he jumped. If Tsuruta jumped to New Japan, you would have to rent the Tokyo Dome for three nights straight to get in all of Tsuruta's dream matches against the New Japan guys, and you would sell out the Dome a month ahead of time with thousands of people waiting outside trying to get in. One day soon, Misawa of Kobashi will unseat Tsuruta and it will be the biggest story of the year and also the most heartbreaking since a true legend will step down.



KEIJI MUTOH: #4 (By Mike Lano)

Second place goes to Akira Hokuto. It is tough enough to convince my friends how good Japanese wrestling is, but to convince them that a Japanese woman is so good is totally impossible. Well, that is their loss since Hokuto was the wrestler to watch this year. Her match on Jan. 4 against Bull Nakano on Jan. 4 was as good a wrestling match as has ever been staged. She does not have the charisma of Chigusa Nagayo or Dump Matsumoto, but she is better than either of them. Hell, I would say she is probably better than Mildred Burke. A shoot between those two would be the ultimate dream match.

JAPANESE TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

- 1) **HIROSHI HASE & KENSUKE SASAKI (31%)**
- 2) **MITSUHARA MISAWA & KOSHIKI KAWADA (28%)**
- 3) **TERRY GORDY & STEVE WILLIAMS (14%)**
- 4) **DOUG FURNAS & DAN KROFFAT (6%)**
- 5) **JOEL DEATON & BILLY BLACK (3%)**

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: *Steve Williams & Terry Gordy, Masa Chono & Keiji Muto, Mitsuhiro Misawa & Toshiaki Kawada*

CHRIS ZAVISA: Misawa & Kawada, Hase & Sasaki, and Gordy & Williams. The endless series of truly great matches involving the team of Mitsuhiro Misawa and Toshiaki Kawada is all the evidence you need to proclaim these two as the world's greatest. They work together as well as Cornette's Midnight Express and have the ability of Flair and Steamboat at their heights.

PAUL HANLIN: This is between two teams in my book, Hase & Sasaki and Misawa & Kawada. Misawa & Kawada get the nod because of all those excellent six-man matches between Tsuruta's crew and because they tagged together for the full balloting period. If Sasaki had not been injured in August, then I would really have to think about this. Williams and Gordy get third.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Hiro Hase & Kensuke Sasaki were the perfect blend. They consistently had excellent matches, from their battles with the Steiners over the IWGP belts to their match with Iizuka and Koshinaka in March. Simply awesome, especially Hase as a heel.



TATSUMI FUJINAMI

VINNIE CAROLAN: Hase & Sasaki. While they were a team, no one, including the Steiners, wrestled more fluidly and smoothly than these guys. Misawa & Kawada gets runner up for never going below three stars in any of their TV matches.

ANDY STOWELL: The thing about Misawa & Kawada is that you have to enjoy them now since in two years they'll be having the feud of the year. These guys fought some of the best teams in wrestling and beat them convincingly. Add Kobashi in for a six-man and you've got a main event that will sell out any building, even if they're against Abdullah & Kimala I & II. The highlight of the year was when Tsuruta submitted to Misawa during a tag

team match in Budokan Hall on Sept. 4. I don't think that there has ever been a team so over in Japan as Misawa & Kawada and that is a major accomplishment.

JOSEPH PERRY: Hiro Hase & whomever his partner happened to be that night. Whether it was Muto or Sasaki or anyone else, it was Hase that made the team.

DAN FARREN: Furnas & Kroffat are one of the finest tag teams in the world. I hope '92 will bring them more U.S. exposure.

STEVE SIMS: The crowd reactions whenever Misawa & Kawada beat Williams & Gordy were fantastic. They drew fans who cared about the result as well as the selling. Great workrate throughout. They made Gordy & Williams look good enough for the number two pick.

JAPANESE FEUD OF THE YEAR

- 1) MISAWA VS. TSURUTA (65%)
- 2) GORDY & WILLIAMS VS. MISAWA & KAWADA (10%)
- 3) VAN VADER VS. TATSUMI FUJINAMI (5%)
- 4) JUSHIN LIGER VS. NORIO HONAGA (5%)
- 5) ATSUHI ONITA VS. TATSUTOSHI GOTO (3%)

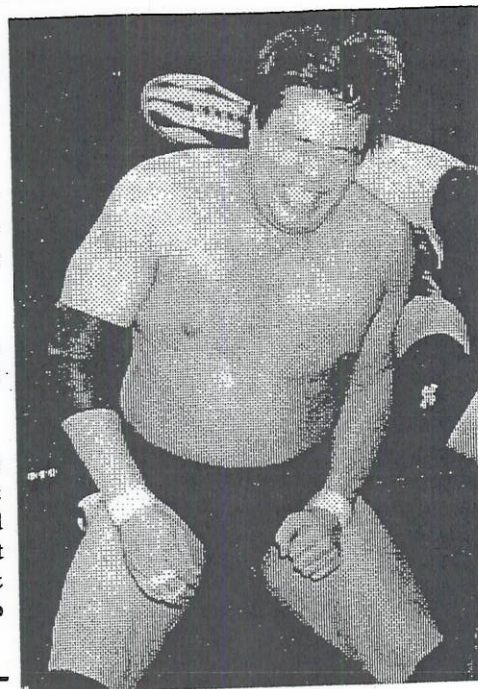
PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: Misawa vs. Tsuruta, Liger vs. Sano, Luger vs. Pegasus Kid

CHRIS ZAVISA: Misawa's team vs. Tsuruta's team, Onita vs. Goto, and Akira Taue vs. Toshiaki Kawada. For two years in a row, six-man teams headed by Misawa and Tsuruta have done battle night after night all over Japan and hundreds of thousands of fans have been dazzled by their stories being told. Onita and Goto have done a yeoman job at carrying FMW despite being the only two wrestlers any of the fans care about. They have had to feud with each other repeatedly even though the fans know they are close friends and business partners, but still they make it work.

ANDY STOWELL: I'm copping out here and voting for Jumbo Tsuruta vs. "The Young Lions", Kobashi, Misawa, and Kawada. All were fantastic.

JOSEPH PERRY: Any feud that can be



JUMBO TSURUTA

successfully dragged into a second year and still hold fan interest in a big way deserves to win, so I give it to the Tsuruta vs. Misawa feud in any and all of its incarnations, whether singles or tag bouts.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Any combination of Misawa and Kawada against Gordy and Williams. Singles or tag team, these four had some of the best TV matches this year. There is always great heat between these four and there is a believability in just how mean Gordy and Williams are.

JAPANESE PROMOTION OF THE YEAR

- 1) ALL JAPAN (44%)
- 2) NEW JAPAN (30%)
- 3) ALL JAPAN WOMEN (13%)
- 4) FRONTIER MARTIAL ARTS (5%)
- 5) SUPER WORLD SPORTS (4%)

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1990: All Japan, New Japan, Universal Wrestling Federation

CHRIS ZAVISA: All Japan, All Japan Women, and FMW. Giant Baba should write a textbook on the building of a successful wrestling promotion. He would not need one iota of outside advice or help. All Japan Women have elevated their slice of the sport to new levels of excellence and in doing so have attracted a new male audience that previously spurned their product. FMW gets more out of less than nearly anybody in the business.

PAUL HANLIN: The only women's wrestling I was ever exposed to in the years I have been a fan was POWW, GLOW, and LMLW where everybody has a belt but are never seen going into the ring with one. So when I finally saw a few All Japan Women tapes, I was skeptical. But they have the best workrate, the best workers, and the best matches I have seen in many moons. Their May 26 show in Tokyo had three five star calibre matches. Talk about culture shock.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: All Japan rules. They consistently deliver the best matches, the most to their fans, the best workers in the world and clean finishes. Everyone of my non-wrestling friends that I have shown All Japan matches to loses their "it's fake" attitude really quickly.



SCOTT & RICK STEINER

ANDY STOWELL: This was tough for me. New Japan is still my favorite, but All Japan was better this year. The key is that All Japan has such a strong wrestler on top while New Japan has a couple of guys who shift in and out of the top position. They are very close, but to be objective, I will go with All Japan.

VINNIE CAROLAN: All Japan Women gets first. All Japan gets second and New Japan gets third. All Japan Women always had a card with two or more three star matches and every woman puts out 100 percent in their match. What else can you ask for? AJW knows how to promote wrestling and although some of their matches have been done over before, every show is solid and enjoyable. New Japan is exciting and fresh and although they do not always have great shows, usually the shows are good and fast

paced.

STEVE SIMS: All Japan, New Japan, and FMW. Choshu of New Japan gets best booker award because every near fall counts and on any given day he can have anybody beat anybody. Onita gets best promoter for selling all those seats with garbage wrestlers. Baba of All Japan gets best promotion for having the best matches night in and night out, phenomenal TV success, and almost nightly sellouts.

JOSEPH PERRY: Even though the talent pool is somewhat shallower than All Japan's, and the match quality varies as well, I give it to New Japan because the promotion has given us some excellent matches with finishes that were not as easy to predict as All Japan's. This is definitely a close one, though.

JAPANESE MATCH OF THE YEAR

- 1) **HASE & SASAKI VS. RICK & SCOTT STEINER:**
3/9 Tokyo (29%)
- 2) **MISAWA & KAWADA & KOBASHI VS. TSURUTA & TAE & FUCHI:** 4/20 Tokyo (15%)
- 3) **LIGER VS. HART:** 4/28 Tokyo (14%)
- 4) **BULL NAKANO VS. AKIRA HOKUTO:** 1/4 Tokyo (10%)
- 5) **JUMBO TSURUTA VS. KENTA KOBASHI:** 5/24 Tokyo (8%)

CHRIS ZAVISA: Misawa & Kawada & Kobashi vs. Tsuruta & Fuchi & Tave (4/20), Nakano vs. Hokuto, and Tsuruta & Tave & Fuji vs. Misawa & Kawada & Kobashi (3/2). The Tsuruta team and Misawa team took to the ring on April 20 and did battle for 51 minutes. They did every move in the book and worked a pace rarely seen in a men's match. When they left the ring, the fans stood and chanted their names for several minutes before going home. Nakano and Hokuto had the best women's match of the year and probably the all-around best singles bout as well just a few days into the new year at Korakuen Hall. Both women dazzled and amazed the crowd with moves that fans are still talking about. The Misawa vs. Tsuruta six-man tag bout from March 2 was never on TV but survives on hand-held pirated video and is one of the best you will ever see with everyone working hard and fast and stiff for half an hour without a moment of rest.

ANDY STOWELL: Nakano vs. Hokuto combined brawling, scientific wrestling,



DUMP MOTSUMOTO

shooting, and suicidal aerial moves all in one match. My heart leaped straight into my throat when Nakano piledrive Hokuto from the second rope. Plus, the crowd was totally psychotic. Nakano looked like she was going to bust into tears at any moment out of frustration and Hokuto looked unstoppable. This match should become required viewing at any wrestling school around the country. Runner up: Muto vs. Chono on Aug. 11 at Sumo Hall. This may not have been the best match, but for emotional content, this was the one that wins. Just superb work between the two: Misawa & Kawada vs. Tsuruta & Tave from Sept. 9 in Tokyo gets third. When Hulk Hogan submits clean in the middle of the ring, we'll talk greatness. Until then, Jumbo rules the world!

GABRIEL DAIGLE: The six-man with Misawa & Kawada & Kobashi vs. Tsuruta & Tave & Fuchi on 4/20 was phenomenal. The heat between both teams seemed very real. The crowd was into this match as much as you will ever see any Japanese audience. Hase & Sasaki against the Steiners at the Dome was a wrestling clinic. If you want to use a match at wrestling school's to get over what wrestling is all about, use this one. Kobashi vs. Kroffat and Budokan was one hot move after another. It was ten minutes of non-stop action and showcased both men's talents.

PAUL HANLIN: The Japanese kick our butts at just about anything these days, including putting together a great match. The best was Debbie Malenko & Kyoko Inoue vs. Esther Moreno & Mariko Yoshida from the May 26 All Japan Women's card in Tokyo. One of the greatest matches I have ever seen. The Steiner's awesome battle from March 21 at the Dome vs. Hase & Sasaki gets second; a wrestling clinic and a classic. Toshio Yamada vs. Yumiko Hotta from May 26 gets third; a stiff, unbelievably brutal match that was surely worked to look like a shoot.

Adorable Adrian Adonis Gay-Bashing Award: Bushwackers for their "faggot" chants at arenas, Brian Pillman for his "Johnny B. Gay" remark, Jim Ross for his unending innuendos and jokes at Paul E. Dangerously, and of course to the promoters without whom none of this would be possible. (Eddie Goldman)

Funniest Skit: No contest. The Mountie going to jail. It makes me laugh just thinking about it. (Jeff Benson)

Stupidest Skits: Desperadoes, enough said.

George "Crybaby" Cannon Award: "Hollywood" John Tatum. Either Cannon was one of Tatum's favorites as he was growing up or he's managed to steal the gimmick he never even saw. (Jack Thompson)

Most Abused Wrestler Award: Terry Taylor. He might as well be the Red Rooster again with the type of push WCW's given him. (Tim Whitehead)

Most Insulting Stereotype Award: Missy Hyatt. (Elyse Zois)

Self-Promotion Capitalist Award: To Magnificent Mimi for those voice-over commercials for her "Body Slam" poster on LPWA telecasts. (Jack Thompson)

The Red-Rooster Award: To Vince McMahon for his total destruction of Butch Miller and Luke Williams. In the NWA/UWF, those two were one of my absolute favorite tag teams, but now I cringe when they come on with their head-rubbing, licking, and stomach-turning routine. (Jack Thompson)

Fester and Gomez Award: Paul Bearer and the Undertaker. (Elyse Zois)

Most Dangerous Screw-Up: Sid Vicious screwing up the power bomb and almost breaking Brian Pillman's neck in the War Games. (Jeff Benson)

Worst Impersonation of a Rock Star Award: Van hammer (Elyse Zois)

Worst Impersonation of a Human Being: Jamison. (Elyse Zois)

Most Misused Wrestler: WCW does not have a clue how to use Big Van Vader. If New Japan got him over so well, in the gimmick land of the U.S., he should have been over huge. I guarantee you in the WWF he would have been. (Jeff Benson)

Great Start, Stupid Decision: Both in the same award - WCW's light heavyweight division. Pillman vs. Badstreet was a great start, that's how you get the light heavyweights over. Putting stiff like Joey Maggs, Mike Graham, and a lazy Ricky Morton is how you make people turn off their televisions. (Jeff Benson)

Best Single Interview: Stu Hart at SummerSlam. (Anthony Scala)

Best Use of Grecian Formula 16: Eric Bischoff in the AWA. His hair looked like Captain Kangaroos. Now, talk about your teflon.

The Sid Vicious When He's Not Playing Softball, Injured, or Making an ass of Himself in Bars Waving Cleaning Utensils at People Smaller than Him, He Rules the World Award: Sid Justice. (Matt Creamer)

Best Actor Outside the Ring: Jake "The Snake" Roberts. Especially the great work of Thespianism he did in the Anabolic Warrior snake-filled room skit. Give him an "Oscar" for that one. (Joseph Margosian)

Best Actor Inside the Ring: Arn Anderson. His role-playing in the ring really effectuates believability. He may be the greatest at what he does.

Proof that B.F. Skinner Was Wrong Award: B.F. Skinner's test data indicated that if you electrically shocked a mouse for pulling a lever, it would cease pulling the lever. However, Sting continued repeatedly to open boxes on WCW cards even after repeatedly being assaulted by the contents. So B.F. Skinner was wrong (or Sting is less intelligent than a rodent). (Tim Whitehead)

THE MISSING AWARDS

By Readers of Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly

Worst Finish Award: Ric Flair wins for his team by being on the floor when everyone in the ring was disqualified. (Elyse Zois)

They operated on his knee, but they should have operated on his brain: Sting, for saying to Rick Rude, "I've got two words for you - Come here, pal... well, I guess that's three." (Anthony Scala)

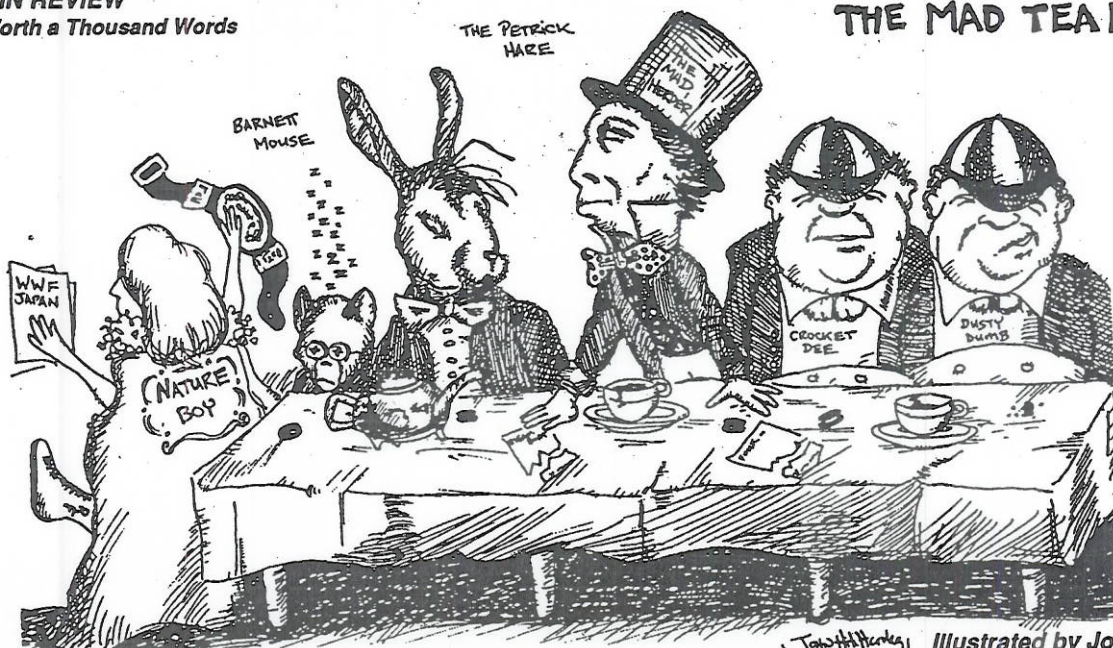
Gutsiest Performance Award: Mr. Perfect, with a badly injured back, going into SummerSlam and having a match of the year candidate with Bret Hart, taking his usual wild bumps the entire way. He did not even look hurt at all, an amazing athlete. (Jeff Benson)

Terry Funk Award for the Most Entertaining in the ring and on the Mic Award: Definitely Cactus Jack. Jack is the only wrestler I could really compare favorably to Terry Funk in their particular brand of style. (Jeff Benson)

Most Suicidal Maneuver: It is definitely the moonsault out of the ring, but which one? It is a much better move when the likes of Asai and Liger do it, but when I saw Billy Black, at his size, execute one, that is suicidal! (Jeff Benson)

Most Missed From American Wrestling Scene: Easy. Jim Cornette. We want him back. (Jeff Benson)

WCW YEAR IN REVIEW A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words



Illustrated by John Hitchcock

1991 YEAR-IN-REVIEW

BY: WADE KELLER

When 1991 began, both of the major two promotions were coming off failed experiments. The WWF was ready to dump Ultimate Warrior as its "torch-bearer" of the future and WCW was ready to pull the World Title from Sting and return it to perennial title holder, Ric Flair.

By April, the panic buttons had been pushed and Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair, the two leading wrestlers in the 1980's, were leaders of the top two promotions in this country again. It looked like 1991 would be a year revisiting the late-80s, with Flair almost losing the WCW Title every night against popular foes and Hogan fending off one heel after another.

Then real life hit wrestling in the face like a pie on a WWF skit.

The in-ring action took a back seat as a WWF physician was accused of wrongful distribution of steroids and as Flair ran into a contract dispute which, combined with personal clashes with management, led to his departure from WCW. Earlier in the year, war erupted in the Middle East and the WWF capitalized on it and centered their Wrestlemania main event around exploiting the strong emotions in the country at the time. That acted as a springboard for the mainstream media to begin to look at pro wrestling with a more critical eye. The media publicity combined with the overall bad taste of the angle led to a drop in WWF popularity. WCW house show attendance dropped to unprecedented numbers while WWF ratings on NBC fell enough to cause them to be cancelled. Billy Graham, who believes his deteriorated physical condition is largely due to steroids, went public with accusations about the amount of steroid use in pro wrestling. Hogan answered those charges by saying on Arsenio Hall that he never used steroids to gain muscle mass.

As the awards on the previous pages attest to, there was also plenty that happened in 1991 - good and bad - in the ring, although for the first time in years, no singles World Title match made the top ten list in the "Match of the Year" balloting. Ric Flair's match quality dropped due to a variety of factors, the main one being lack of quality opponents, although when given a quality opponent, such as Bobby Eaton, the MTV short sound-byte style of wrestling allotted the two-out-of-three falls match only 15 minutes.

While the WWF was criticized all year for a major booking disaster by exploiting the war in the Middle East and promoting Sgt. Slaughter as its champion, Dusty Rhodes was in the midst of his second reign as booker in WCW. Rhodes, returning after three years away from a booking position, took over the number two promotion and dragged it to new depths in virtually every aspect. Match quality went down, gimmickry got more outrageous and nonsensical, house show attendance dropped to all-time lows, and the storylines of the promotion were more inconsistent than ever. Jim Herd, Executive Vice President of WCW throughout the entire year, was criticized for allowing and contributing to the fall of WCW.

As the year came to the close, the WWF looked to be on the brink of a major public relations disaster (and no one predicted it would become as big as it did) and WCW was on an upswing with the additions of Rick Steamboat, Cactus Jack, Rick Rude, and Jushin Liger. The following is an analysis of the top fifteen stories of the 1991. On the right side of this page you will find a listing of the top 50 stories of the year as determined by an impromptu panel discussion of wrestling journalists, and the following pages contain a run-down of some of the major and not-so-major title changes from the year 1991.

TOP 50 STORIES IN AMERICAN PRO WRESTLING IN 1991

- 1: Dr. George Zahorian Steroid Trial
- 2: Flair Leaves WCW, Joins WWF
- 3: Hogan Denies Steroid Use on "Arsenio"
- 4: WWF Exploits Gulf War to Sell Tickets
- 5: Rhodes Begins 2nd Reign as WCW Booker
- 6: Flair vs. Hogan Finally Occurs
- 7: Ultimate Warrior Quits Wrestling
- 8: WWF Begins Steroid Testing
- 9: Graham Goes Public About Steroids
- 10: GWF Forms, Replaces USWA on ESPN
- 11: NBC Cancels WWF Programming
- 12: Wrestlemania Bombs With 2.8 Buyrate
- 13: Wrestlemania Location Changed
- 14: WCW Arena Attendance Disastrous
- 15: Flair Wins 7th NWA/WCW Title from Sting
- 16: Sid Eudy Jumps to WWF
- 17: Portland Wrestling TV Show Cancelled
- 18: WWF Runs Two PPVs in One Week
- 19: Mushnick of N.Y. Post Critically Covers WWF
- 20: Undertaker is Six-Day Champion
- 21: National Sports Daily Stops Publishing
- 22: Hogan Wins WWF Title Third Time
- 23: "Suburban Commando" Dies Early
- 24: Bash PPV is Terrible, Lowpoint for WCW
- 25: Light Heavyweight Divisions Established
- 26: Rude, Steamboat Sign With WCW
- 27: Youngest Von Erich, Chris, Dies
- 28: Tokyo Starrcade Sells Out Dome
- 29: WCW Summer TV Ratings Dangerously Low
- 30: Jushin Liger Debuts in U.S.
- 31: Justice Injured, Raises Questions on Him
- 32: Scott Steiner Disappointing at Clash vs. Flair
- 33: Dick the Bruiser Dies
- 34: WCW Granted Meadowlands Dates
- 35: Slaughter Wins WWF Title At Rumble
- 36: Fujinami Wins WCW Title, Stripped
- 37: McMahon "KOed" after Flair-Piper Brawl
- 38: Gilbert Becomes Booker of GWF
- 39: Scott Steiner Injured, Out For Months
- 40: WWF Cooperates With Japan's SWS
- 41: Legion of Doom Wins Third World Title
- 42: Luger Wins Vacant WCW Title
- 43: Cactus Jack Joins WCW
- 44: Sports Illustrated Shills for McMahon
- 45: Savage and Elizabeth "Wed" on PPV
- 46: Four Horsemen Disband
- 47: Cactus vs. Gilbert Ignites Hardcore Fans
- 48: Globe Exposes Ultimate Warrior's Past
- 49: UWF Holds PPV Which Bombs
- 50: Eddie Mansfield Returns to Promoting

TITLE CHANGES IN 1991

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

WORLD CHAMPION

Ric Flair (def. Sting₁, East Rutherford, N.J., 1/11)
Tatsumi Fujinami₂ (def. Ric Flair, Tokyo Japan, 3/21)
Ric Flair₃ (def. Tatsumi Fujinami, St. Petersburg, Fla.,

5/19)

Vacated (stripped from Flair, Macon, Ga., 7/1)
Lex Luger₄ (def. Windham for vacant title, Miami, Fla., 7/14)

(1) Been champion since July 7, 1990 when he defeated Flair in Baltimore, Md.

(2) In a controversial decision, Fujinami became WCW World Champion. However, the IWGP (New Japan) recognized the title change, but WCW did not. The May 19 match was to decide the "Undisputed" World Championship. The week of Sept. 8, the NWA board retroactively declared this an NWA World Title change.)

(3) July 1, Flair is fired for no-showing Macon, Ga. TV taping after a contract dispute and the WCW World Championship is declared vacant. The week of Sept. 8, the NWA board votes Jim Herd NWA President and Flair is stripped of NWA World Championship status. Prior to this date, even upon entering the WWF, Flair was recognized as NWA Champion.

(4) Lex Luger vacates the U.S. Title on July 14, a belt which he held since Dec. 16, 1990.

UNITED STATES HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Sting (def. Steve Austin in tournament final, Atlanta, Ga., 8/25)

Rick Rude (def. Sting, Savannah, Ga., 11/19)

Previous Champion was Lex Luger who defeated Stan Hansen in a Texas Lariat match in Chicago on Dec. 16.

WORLD TELEVISION CHAMPION

Arn Anderson (def. Tom Zenk₁, Perry, Ga., 1/7)

Bobby Eaton₂ (def. Arn Anderson, St. Petersburg, Fla., 5/19)

Steve Austin (def. Bobby Eaton, Montgomery, Ala., 6/4)

(1) Been champion since 12/4/90 when he defeated Anderson in Atlanta, Ga.

(2) June 3, Austin defeated Eaton for the title via Lady Blossom's interference in Birmingham, Ala. June 4, due to Lady Blossom's interference, the title change is voided.

WORLD LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Brian Pillman (def. Richard Morton in tournament final, Chattanooga, Tenn., 10/27/91)

Jushin Liger (def. Brian Pillman, Atlanta, Ga. 12/25)

(1) Tournament held for reinstatement of championship.

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin₁ (def. Butch Reed & Ron Simmons₂, Phoenix, Az., 2/24)

Rick & Scott Steiner₃ (def. Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin, Montgomery, Ala., 2/18)

Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko (def. Bill Kazmaier & Rick Steiner in tournament final in Augusta, Ga., 9/5)

Dustin Rhodes & Rick Steamboat (def. Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko, Savannah, Ga., 11/19)

(1) TV taping to be aired after "WrestleWar '91" (2/24). WCW's official title change date is its air-date of 3/9.

(2) Been the champions since they defeated the Steiners on May

1.

DR. GEORGE ZAHORIAN STERIOD TRIAL

Dr. George T. Zahorian III, an osteopath and urological surgeon and resident physician at WWF television tapings in the late-80s, was brought to trial on June 24 charged with nine counts of distributing steroids and five counts of distributing other controlled substances, plus two counts of using his office to distribute such drugs.

Four days later, Zahorian was found guilty on twelve of the counts by a jury of 12. Five months later he was sentenced to three years in jail, 24 years probation, a \$12,700 fine, and forfeiture of his half-ownership of his office condo. After sentencing, the justice department released a statement saying all future sentences for similar offenses will be stiffer.

During the trial, Roddy Piper and Rick Martel of the WWF admitted to using steroids supplied by Zahorian, as did independent wrestlers Brian Blair and Dan Spivey. Hulk Hogan was originally subpoenaed but was released when Judge William Caldwell determined the benefit of Hogan appearing at the trial was outweighed by the personal and professional distress appearing at the trial would cause him. This stirred anger on the part of many current and former wrestlers who saw Hogan escaping a bench which he deserved to sit on more than anyone.

The trial opened the door to mainstream coverage of steroid abuse in pro wrestling. The media pressure grew to the point that the WWF announced a steroid testing policy soon after the trial. Steroid use in pro wrestling was not significantly affected by the trial, but the media's and the public's awareness that illegal steroid use was a problem in professional wrestling grew to a level that opened the door to many mainstream stories still to come.

It also led to the number three story of the year, Hulk Hogan denying on the "Arsenio Hall Show" he ever used steroids to enhance his size. That statement angered many former wrestlers who believed Hogan should not lie to the public.

2.

RIC FLAIR LEAVES WCW, JOINS THE WWF

Ric Flair symbolized "the other promotion" for years. Flair was the NWA/WCW World Champion off and on (mostly on) for most of the 80s. He represented the anti-Hogan, the anti-WWF, the alternative. He was a popular heel, a popular babyface, and most importantly, a respected drawing card for many years.

Because of this, when a contract dispute and disagreements with WCW management led to his departure, it ended an era of wrestling for long-time WCW and NWA fans.

WCW Executive Vice President Jim Herd offered Flair a three-year contract reportedly for \$350,000, \$350,000, and \$250,000 respectively which would replace his current contract, still good for one year at \$750,000. Flair turned it down, and simultaneously was fired and quit.

The major problem for WCW was that Flair still held the WCW World

Heavyweight Championship and owned the belt that represented that title. In what might be regarded as the all-time low moment for WCW, Jim Herd read a statement on WCW that WCW had stripped Flair of World Title status and that the top two contenders, Lex Luger and Barry Windham, would fight at the "Great American Bash" pay-per-view to decide who the new champion would be.

For months afterward in virtually every arena in the country, including resoundingly during the Luger vs. Windham match, fans chanted "We Want Flair."

They "got Flair" in September as he joined the World Wrestling Federation signing a three year contract, which in any other year would have been all the WWF needed to be perceived as the number one promotion for life.



RIC FLAIR

Unfortunately for the WWF, Ric Flair, and fans who had been waiting to see Flair in the "big leagues", Titan Sports was so ridden with scandals and politics that Flair's first few months in the WWF were far from spectacular, including the lowest point as Flair was the lone survivor in his match at "Survivor Series" because he was lying outside the ring as all of the other wrestlers from both teams brawled to disqualification.

In retrospect, Flair's departure from WCW and signing with the WWF could have been the best thing to happen to wrestling. WCW was on a course to nowhere with or without Flair, and without Flair they were forced to think long term and develop young talent like Steve Austin, Dustin Rhodes, Brian Pillman, Cactus Jack, and even Rick Rude. The WWF, meanwhile,

saw their perennial top wrestler, Hulk Hogan, face such media scrutiny and potential public scandal that it looked more and more like Flair would be a short-term leader of the promotion if Hogan retired.

3.

HULK HOGAN SAYS "I AM NOT A STEROID ABUSER" ON ARSENIO HALL

The biggest miscue of the year looked to be the exploitation of the war in the Middle East by the WWF. On July 10, Hulk Hogan unknowingly (or naively) topped that.

"First off, I am what I am," said Hogan on the "Arsenio Hall Show", "I am a real American. I love my family, I love my god, I love all of my people that believe in me. And basically this isn't a Lyle Alzado story you're going to hear out here... But there are two things I'm not. I am not a steroid abuser and I do not use steroids."

Hogan then said he was given steroids three times in 1983 to help heel an

19, 1990 in Washington D.C.

(3) July 8, 1991, stripped of titles due to Scott Steiner sustained a torn bicep. Also held U.S. Tag Team Titles since Aug. 24, 1990 and relinquished them April 4.

UNITED STATES TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin₁ (def. Steve Armstrong & Tracy Smothers for vacant₂ titles, St. Petersburg, Fla., 5/19)

Todd Champion & Firebreaker Chip (def. Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin, Gainesville, Ga., 8/12)

Steve Armstrong & Tracy Smothers (def. Todd Champion & Firebreaker Chip, Gainesville, Ga., 11/5)

(1) Co-holders of World Six-Man Tag Team Championship from June 3 to Aug. 5.

(2) Previous champions, Rick & Scott Steiner, had to vacate the title upon becoming World Tag Team Champions. Steiners had defeated Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane on Aug. 24, 1990 in East Rutherford, N.J..

WORLD SIX-MAN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Junkyard Dog & Ricky Morton & Timmy Rich (def. Buddy Landel & Dutch Mantel & Moondog Rex in elimination match for reinstated title in Atlanta, Ga. on 2/7)

Jimmy Garvin & Michael Hayes & Badstreet [Brad Armstrong] (def. Junkyard Dog & Tommy Rich₁ in Birmingham, Ala. on 6/3)

Big Josh & Dustin Rhodes & Tom Zenk (def. Jimmy Garvin & Michael Hayes & Badstreet, St. Joseph, Mo., 8/5)

Richard Morton & Thomas Rich & Terrence Taylor (def. Big Josh & Dustin Rhodes & Tom Zenk, Columbus, Ga., Oct. 91)

(1) Became two vs. three when Morton refused to participate as he was joining the York Foundation.

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

WORLD CHAMPION

Sgt. Slaughter (def. Ultimate Warrior₁, Miami, Fla., 1/9)

Hulk Hogan (def. Sgt. Slaughter, Los Angeles, Calif., 3/24)

Undertaker (def. Hulk Hogan, Detroit, Mich., 11/27)

Hulk Hogan₂ (def. Undertaker, San Antonio, Tex., 12/3)

(1) Been champion since April 1, 1990 when he defeated Hulk Hogan in Toronto, Ontario.

(2) Programs which air weekend of Dec. 7 have Tunney declare Hogan is stripped of WWF Title due to throwing ashes in Undertaker's eyes and the title is declared vacant with the winner of the Royal Rumble on Jan. 19 to be declared the winner.

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION

Bret Hart (def. Curt Hennig₁ by submission, New York City, N.Y., Madison Square Garden, 8/26)

(1) Hennig had been champion since Nov. 19 when defeated Kerry Von Erich in Rochester, N.Y.

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Brian Knobbs & Jerry Saggs ["The Nasty Boys"] (def. Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart, Los Angeles, Calif., 3/24)

Legion of Doom (def. Brian Knobbs & Jerry Saggs, New York, N.Y., Madison Square Garden, 8/26)

(1) Been the champion since Aug. 27, 1990 when they defeated Demolition at Philadelphia. Briefly lost the belts to Marty Jannetty & Shawn Michaels in Ft. Wayne, Ind. on Oct. 30 but the title change was voided on Nov. 6, 1990 and never acknowledged.

GLOBAL WRESTLING FEDERATION

NORTH AMERICAN CHAMPION

The Patriot, [Del Wilkes] (def. Al Perez in a tournament final, Dallas, Tex., 8/10 to be first champion)
The Patriot (def. Al Perez for vacated title, Dallas, Tex., Aug. 23)

(1) June 29 becomes TV Champion, but forfeits that belt upon becoming the North American Champion. Aug. 16, refuses to accept North American Title due to Perez's feet being in the ropes during the Aug. 10 match.

TELEVISION CHAMPION

The Patriot, (def. Buddy Landell in tournament final to be first TV Champion, Dallas, Tex., 6/29)
Eddie Gilbert (def. Handsome Stranger in tournament final on a reversed decision DQ, Dallas, Tex., 10/4)

(1) After becoming N.Am. Champion, forfeits this title.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Lightning Kid (def. Jerry Lynn in tournament final, Dallas, Tex., 7/13)
Chaz (def. Lightning Kid, Dallas, Tex., 9/13)
Lightning Kid, (def. Chaz, Marietta, Ga., 9/15)
Jerry Lynn (def. Lightning Kid two falls to one, Dallas, Tex., 12/27)

(1) Ricky Rice defeated Lightning Kid for the title in Minneapolis, Minn. on a PWA card, however that was an unofficial title change not sanctioned by the GWF.

(2) Stipulation was the only way falls could be won was with the finishing moves of each man.

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Steve Simpson & Chris Walker (def. Scott Anthony & Rip Rogers in tournament final to decide first champions, Dallas, Tex., 7/27)
Rod Price & John Tatum (def. Scott Putski, & Steve Simpson, Dallas, Tex., 11/29)
Black Bart & Bill Irwin (def. Rod Price & John Tatum two falls to one, Dallas, Tex., 12/27)

(1) Substitute for Chris Walker who joined the WWF.

UNITED STATES WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

UNIFIED HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Jerry Lawler (def. Terry Funk, Memphis, Tenn., 3/11)
Awesome Kong (def. Jerry Lawler, Memphis, Tenn., 7/29)
Jerry Lawler (def. Awesome Kong, Memphis, Tenn., 8/12)
Dragon Master (def. Jerry Lawler, Memphis, Tenn., 8/26)
Jerry Lawler (def. Dragon Master, Memphis, Tenn., 9/2)
Kimala (def. Jerry Lawler, Memphis, Tenn., 11/25)
Jerry Lawler, (def. Kimala, Memphis, Tenn., 12/2)
Kimala (def. Jerry Lawler for the held-up title, Memphis, Tenn., 12/9)

(1) Been champion since Nov. 12, 1990 when he defeated Lawler in Memphis.

(2) Dec. 27, title is held-up due to Kimala repeatedly shoving the referee and Lawler hitting Kimala in the face with a fireball.

SOUTHERN CHAMPION

Jeff Jarrett, (def. Brian Lee, tournament final, Memphis, Tenn., 1/14)

arm injury - and that was it. Otherwise, Hogan claimed, he never used steroids.

The whole steroid issue might have cooled as the Zahorian trial became a distant memory and because the WWF announced it would be conducting the most comprehensive drug testing and rehabilitation program in all of professional sports and entertainment. It might have been considered a dead issue and certainly the mainstream media has never been accused of going out of their way to cover an issue involving pro wrestling. People would say wrestlers used them in the past before the dangers were known and now that the dangers are known and the WWF claims to test for them, why bring up the subject.



HULK HOGAN

Instead, Hogan said what he said to a national audience, an audience that included wrestlers who claim to have personally injected Hogan with steroids. Those wrestlers were unhappy that Hogan had the gall to lie to the public about something so obvious in a blatant attempt to continue to make money off of his wholesome image.

That speech on "Arsenio" might be looked at as the biggest promoting miscue in the history of pro wrestling. Whether Hogan said what he said on a directive from Vince McMahon or defied McMahon's orders will never be known. What is known is the impact it had not just in 1991, but in the early months of 1992, peaking with a front page story in the *L.A. Times* and *San Diego Union-Tribune* in March of 1992.

4.

WWF EXPLOITS GULF WAR TO SELL WRESTLEMANIA

Vince McMahon was respected in that he knew what to do and when to do it when it came to professional wrestling. The "Rock and Wrestling Connection", a phenom he created, helped the WWF become fashionable in the mid-80s and opened the door to a marketing empire. His use of Mr. T helped elevate "Wrestlemania I" to a major event. His capitalization of pay-per-view television and ability to stomp out competition early was a strong business move. His promotion of Hulk Hogan as a mainstream hero kept the WWF on top for years. The intricacies of every angle, from Andre the Giant ripping the cross off of Hogan's neck to the brilliant, well-calculated turn of Paul Orndorff, were admired by many.

Then came 1991 and that wisdom and timing was gone. Wrestlemania VII was coming up and Ric Flair was still in WCW. Had Flair jumped in 1990, which was very close to happening, Flair would almost assuredly have been Hulk Hogan's opponent. Instead, with no strong heels in the promotion, McMahon was out of ideas - except for one: Capitalize on the patriotism in the country by creating a Saddam Hussein-like character to manage a turncoat and have Hogan defeat them at Wrestlemania. Thus was born General Adnon and Sgt. Slaughter as a tandem.

One thing went wrong.

The United States dropped bombs on Iraq in January and instead of tastefully backing off and turning instead to a more traditional wrestling angle, such as a rematch of Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior with Warrior turning heel, or pushing Jake Roberts, Undertaker, Ted DiBiase, Randy Savage or Mr. Perfect into the number one heel position, McMahon stayed on his course.

Every week, Slaughter talked about receiving wrestling boots from Saddam Hussein and said Hussein told him to use them to defeat that "scum, Hulk Hogan." Hogan, meanwhile, visited a military base, spoke to soldiers, and then aired it on network television to help promote Wrestlemania. The exploitation of the emotions of the United States and the dying soldiers left a bad taste in the mouths of many fans and journalists.

Be it the public's apathy or anger toward the anger, enough people chose not to buy tickets to Wrestlemania live that it was moved from the 100,000 seat Los Angeles Coliseum to the 15,000 seat Los Angeles Sports Arena. On pay-per-view, Wrestlemania received a 2.8 buyrate, which at the time was considered a disaster.

Instead of dropping the General Adnon and Slaughter characters, the WWF continued with the angle all summer, peaking at SummerSlam on pay-per-view as Hogan and Ultimate Warrior teamed to defeat Sgt. Slaughter, General Adnon, and Col. Mustafa.

5.

DUSTY RHODES RETURNS TO BOOKING POSITION IN WCW

Dusty Rhodes leaving the NWA in 1987 was looked at as the first step to the growth and development of the NWA - the needed breath of fresh air to send the NWA back into direct competition with the WWF. Jim Herd was hired as the Executive Vice President when Ted Turner purchased Jim Crockett Promotions and that predicted rise to the top never occurred.

In fact, without Dusty Rhodes as booker, the NWA/WCW promotion took a dive to depths never thought possible for a wrestling company with talent like Ric Flair, Lex Luger, Sting, the Steiners, and national coverage on TBS four hours a week. Various booking committees, George Scott, Ole Anderson, and even Ric Flair himself could not do what was necessary to prove they were the right person to be WCW's long-term booker.

As time passed, the negatives of Rhodes's previous reign as booker faded and the memories of sold-out arenas and higher TV ratings caused Herd to make that phone call and bring Big Dust back.

Rhodes left the WWF in January, actually wrestling his final match at the Royal Rumble after already taking control of WCW's reigns. He no sooner took control than a lot of Rhodes's problems of the past become apparent. Rhodes planned to replace Dutch Mantel on World Wide Wrestling as the color commentator, he eventually hosted his own interview segment called "The Bull Drop Inn", and shoved the popular Paul E. Dangerously off of the major shows as color commentator and replaced Dangerously with ... himself.

Herd finally banned all mention of Dusty Rhodes's name from television, cancelled the "Bull Drop Inn", and insisted Rhodes concentrate on promoting other people, not himself.

Rhodes eventually got on track and put together an excellent pay-per-view event, SuperBrawl I, headlined with an innovative all-babyface tag team match Rick & Scott Steiner vs. Lex Luger & Sting and Ric Flair vs. Tatsumi

Jeff Jarrett (def. Steve Austin for held-up title, Memphis, Tenn., 3/9)

Tom Prichard (def. Jeff Jarrett, Dallas, Tex., 3/15)

Jeff Jarrett (def. Tom Prichard in cage match for the held-up title, Memphis, Tenn., 4/5)

Jeff Jarrett (def. Tom Prichard, Dallas, Tex., 4/12)

Eric Embry (def. Jeff Jarrett, Dallas, Tex., 5/3)

Tom Prichard (def. Eric Embry, Memphis, Tenn., 11/4)

Eric Embry (def. Tom Prichard, Memphis, Tenn., 11/9)

Tom Prichard (def. Eric Embry, Memphis, Tenn., 12/2)

Eric Embry (def. Tom Prichard, Memphis, Tenn., 11/9)

(1) Belt is vacated by Eddie Gilbert on Jan. 7 when he leaves USWA. Gilbert was champion since Oct. 10, 1990 when he defeated Jarrett in Memphis.

(2) Title is held up after title defense against Austin.

(3) Championship is held up after controversial decision with Jarrett in Dallas on Mar. 29.

UNITED STATES JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Bill Dundee (def. Danny Davis, Memphis, Tenn., 8/5)

Danny Davis (def. Bill Dundee, Memphis, Tenn., 8/12)

Bill Dundee (def. Danny Davis, Memphis, Tenn., 8/26)

Danny Davis (def. Bill Dundee, Memphis, Tenn., 9/22)

(1) Been champion since Dec. 26, 1990 when he defeated Davis in Memphis

(3) Title recognition has been dropped by USWA since Davis left the territory)

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Steve Keirn & Stan Lane [Fabulous Ones] (def. Dirty White Boy & Doug Gilbert, Memphis, Tenn., 1/7)₂

Jeff Jarrett & Jerry Lawler (def. Steve Keirn & Stan Lane for the held up title, Memphis, Tenn., 2/4)

Texas Hangmen (def. Jeff Jarrett & Jerry Lawler, Louisville, Ky., 3/26)

Robert Fuller & Jeff Jarrett (def. Texas Hangmen, Memphis, Tenn., 5/11)

Barroom Brawlers [Jeff Sword & Doug Vines] (def. Robert Fuller & Jeff Jarrett by DQ, Memphis, Tenn., 7/8)

Jeff Jarrett & Robert Fuller₃ (def. Brawlers in Memphis, Tenn., 7/15)

Texas Outlaws [Sword & Vines] (def. Fuller & Jarrett in Memphis, Tenn., 9/28)

Jeff Jarrett & Robert Fuller (def. Texas Outlaws, Memphis, Tenn., 10/7)

Doug Masters & Bart Sawyer (def. Robert Fuller & Jeff Jarrett, Memphis, Tenn., 11/4)

Robert Fuller & Mike Mitchell (def. Masters & Sawyer, Memphis, Tenn., 11/25)

Moondogs (def. Robert Fuller₄, Memphis, Tenn., 11/30)

(1) Been champions since defeating Jeff Jarrett & Cody Michaels in Memphis 12/8/90

(2) Title held-up due to conflicting decisions from two referees in title defense against Jarrett & Lawler.

(3) Starting on Oct. 7 they won the belts on four different occasions in four different cities ending on Oct. 12 and never lost the belts.

(4) Mitchell no-showed making this a handicap match.

PORTLAND PRO WRESTLING

NORTHWEST CHAMPION

Steve Doll (def. Ron Harris for held-up title, Eugene, Ore., 7/13)

Billy Jack Haynes (def. Steve Doll in a full-nelson challenge match, Portland, Ore., 8/11)

Steve Doll (def. Billy Jack Haynes, Portland, Ore., 9/14)

Rip Oliver (def. Steve Doll, Portland, Ore., 9/28)

Demolition Crush [Bryan Adams] (def. Rip Oliver by submission, Portland, Ore., 10/12)

(1) Championship held up in match against Ron Harris in Eugene

when the referee realized Don Harris, not Ron, scored the pin. Prior to that, Doll had been the champion since Nov. 10, 1990 when he defeated the Grappler in Portland.

NORTHWEST TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Brad Anderson & The Hood, [Ricky Santana] (def. Grappler & Equalizer two falls to one, Portland, Ore., 2/2)

² Brad Anderson & The Hood (def. Steve Doll & Bart Sawyer two falls to one for held up title, Portland, Ore., 2/16)₃

Ron & Don Harris (def. Larry & Rip Oliver for held-up title, Portland, Ore., 4/27)

Rex King & Steve Doll (def. Ron & Don Harris, location unknown, 4/?)

Ron & Don Harris (def. Rex King & Steve Doll, Portland, Ore., 5/4)

Crush & Steve Doll (def. Ron & Don Harris, Portland, Ore., 7/27)

Grappler & Don Harris (def. Crush & Doll, Seaside, Ore., 9/1)

Crush & Mike Miller (def. Grappler & Don Harris, Portland, Ore., 9/28)

Ron & Don Harris (awarded titles after Don Harris def. Grappler in singles match in Portland, Ore., 10/12)₄

Steve Doll & Grappler (def. Ron & Don Harris, Vancouver, Wa. 11/10)

Ron & Don Harris (def. Doll & Grappler, Florence, Ore., 11/25)

Steve Doll & Grappler (def. Bruise Brothers, Portland, Ore., 11/30)

Ron & Don Harris (def. Grappler & Steve Doll, location unknown, 12/?)

Steve Doll & Grappler (def. Ron & Don Harris, Vancouver, Wa., 12/8)

(1) Been champion since Dec. 15, 1990 when they defeated Steve Doll & Scotty the Body in Gresham, Ore.

(2) Promoter Don Owen observes an illegal object used in a two out of three fall title defense against Doll & Sawyer and thus holds up the belts.

(3) Anderson & Hood stripped when Hood was revealed to be Ricky Santana who previously lost a loser leaves the territory match.

(4) Winner of the singles match was allowed to pick their partner.

GEORGIA ALL-STAR WRESTLING

GEORGIA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Joel Deaton (def. Steve Lawler, Canton, Ga., 4/1)

(1) Been champion since Dec. 2, 1990 when he defeated Nick Buskch in Carrollton, Ga.)

GEORGIA TELEVISION CHAMPION

Billy Black (def. Fabian [now Marcus Bagwell], Alpharetta, Ga., 3/29)

Fabian (def. Billy Black, location unknown, 4/?)

Billy Black (def. Fabian, Atlanta, Ga., 4/5)

Terry Lealand (def. Billy Black, Atlanta, Ga., 8/8)

GEORGIA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Fred Avery & Jim Bryant [Pretty Young Things] (won "tournament")

Fabian & Chris Walker (announced as champions after beating Fred Avery & Jim Bryant in Larenceville, Ga., but no match actually took place)

Brute Forcz (def. Fabian & Chris Walker, Canton, Ga., 6/16)

Sugar Ray Lloyd & R.D. Swain (def. Brute Forcz, Marietta, Ga., 9/15)

LADIES PROFESIONAL WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

Fujinami. Unfortunately, the tag match lost some luster because it ended with interference at the end of the match and Flair vs. Fujinami was diluted due to a total lack of promotion in the preceding weeks.

Rhodes then booked Flair into a position of obscurity, placing him in title matches against El Gigante who was wholly unprepared to headline cards and not nearly popular enough to justify the push. These matches continued until Flair quit and in the midst of the steroid controversy, Rhodes once again showed he was not a visionary. He relied on what worked in the past by placing the belt around Lex Luger's waist. While WCW avoided much media scrutiny, they did not escape fan scrutiny. Luger's title reign was promoted horribly. His main challengers were Rick Steiner and Bill Kazmaier. Kazmaier was as unprepared and unpopular as Gigante and Rick Steiner did not have the umpph he had three years earlier when he was hot off a babyface turn and a legitimate main event.

The WCW television shows were indistinguishable from hour-to-hour and week-to-week and no one was excited about WCW. Many predicted this would be the year Ted Turner folded or sold the promotion.



DUSTY RHODES

In the last months of 1991, Rhodes was given some new talent to work with, including Rick Rude, Cactus Jack, Rick Steamboat, and Jesse Ventura, plus the return of Paul E. Dangerously to managing and Scott Steiner from injury. By the end of 1991 Flair was forgotten (or at least his departure was accepted by fans) and Dusty Rhodes, with a solid crew of talent, was on route to showing whether he was all talk and stuck on reruns of past angles or if he could show the ability - without Jim Herd, the ghost of Ric Flair, and a lack of talent - to be a good booker.

During 1991, though, he gave no indication he could lead WCW to much improvement in product or image.

6. RIC FLAIR VS. HULK HOGAN FINALLY OCCURS

October 22, Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan met in Dayton, Ohio for an unscheduled "rehearsal" for their first "official" match in Oakland that Friday. It ended in a double-countout.

Friday, Oct. 25, a near sell-out crowd at the Oakland Coliseum watched Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan stare each other down in mid-ring. Pro-Flair and pro-Hogan signs were scattered throughout the arena. There was an aura of something special, albeit a few years past its peak.

Eleven minutes, thirty-five seconds later, Ric Flair was awarded the WWF World Heavyweight Title belt by the referee and he and Bobby Heenan paraded around the ring as around one-quarter of the crowd cheered and four-quarters of the crowd were shocked. Then a second referee ran to the ring and reversed the decision because Flair used brass knuckles to knock out and pin Hogan.

Virtually every weekend from that night on featured the long-awaited Flair vs. Hogan series. The match quality fell below expectations, although some

nights matches hit the four-star level, most nights it was in the two- and three-star ranges. Crowds were solid, but not consistently sold-out. Without Ric Flair, the WWF would have had a terrible last quarter of 1991. Instead, it was above average.

Flair vs. Hogan was expected to be the main event at Wrestlemania, but instead a national audience will probably never have the opportunity to see Flair vs. Hogan due to Hogan facing Sid Justice and Ric Flair defending the WWF Title against Randy Savage on the April 5, 1992 pay-per-view event.

For the last few years, Flair vs. Hogan was believed to be the only match that could actually fulfill the cliché of "selling out any building in America". It didn't, but it was still a historical series of matches between the two perennial title holders in competing promotions for much of the 1980s.

7.

ULTIMATE WARRIOR QUITS WWF, WRESTLING

April 1, 1990, Ultimate Warrior pinned Hulk Hogan in the main event of Wrestlemania VI. The torch was passed to Warrior, who was supposed to carry the WWF through the 90s.

August 26, 1992, Ultimate Warrior teamed with WWF Champion Hulk Hogan in tag team victory at the main event of SummerSlam. Moments later, Warrior was told to pack his bags. He was "suspended indefinitely" by the WWF for "unprofessional conduct". "Unprofessional conduct", of course, is a phrase used when the WWF chooses to be ambiguous about a touchy situation - this touchy situation was Warrior being fired.

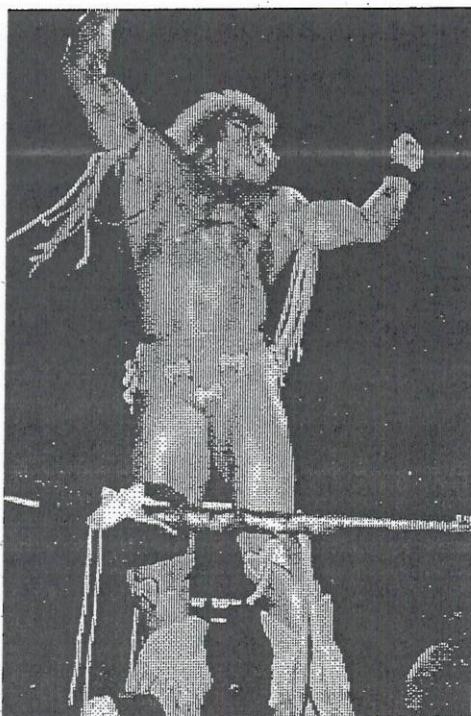
Warrior did not return to the WWF or wrestle for any other promotion for the rest of the year and reports came out saying he told friends he was done with pro wrestling for good.

Two weeks earlier, Warrior skipped two television tapings, reportedly holding out for a hefty guaranteed contract and a lighter schedule. The WWF took two weeks to show him how they felt, but they were not happy with that powerplay and showed everyone in the WWF that they are replaceable - no matter how high on cards they are.

Warrior's name was never mentioned and his feud with Jake Roberts never came through.

In retrospect, the timing could be considered good considering the scrutiny the WWF faced concerning steroid use in their promotion. It is safe to say Ultimate Warrior would not have been a good example of the effectiveness of the policy.

Sid Justice immediately replaced Ultimate Warrior in



ULTIMATE WARRIOR

WORLD CHAMPION

Lady X₁ (def. Susan Sexton₂, Laughlin, Nv., 1/31)

- (1) Originally, Candi Devine, then Interchanged.
- (2) Declared champion arbitrarily.

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Lelani Kai & Judy Martin (def. Misty Blue & Heidi Lee Morgan₁, Laughlin, Nv., 2/28)

- (1) Became champions by defeating Bad Girl & Black Venus at tournament final in Laughlin on Mar. 13, 1990 to become the first champions.

INTERNATIONAL WORLD CLASS CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

ICW CHAMPION

Tony Atlas₁ (def. Vic Steamboat₂, South China, Me., 4/19)

Tito Santana (def. Tony Atlas, Parsippany, N.J., 11/21)

- (1) Quits that night, but still recognized as champion and soon returns.
- (2) Been champion since July 24, 1990 by defeating Atlas in Middletown, N.Y.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Ray Odyssey (awarded title through official decision in Feb. to become first title holder)

Rasmaniac (def. Ray Odyssey, Brooklyn, N.Y., 6/5)

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Billion Dollar Babies (def. Undertakers, Monticello, N.Y., 2/20)

Madison Brothers (def. Billion Dollar Babies, Monticello, N.Y., 2/20)

Equalizers (def. Madison Brothers, Meridian, Conn., 3/9)

Madison Brothers (def. Equalizers, Staten Island, N.Y., 3/9)

Georgia Gorillas (def. Madison Brothers, South China, Me., 4/19)

Madison Brothers (def. Georgia Gorillas, location unknown, 5/?)

Billion Dollar Babies (def. Madison Brothers, Wolfeboro, N.H., 6/1)

PRO WRESTLING AMERICA

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Terminator Riggz (def. Ricky Rice, Fridley, Minn., 1/14)

Charlie Norris (def. Terminator Riggz, Minneapolis, Minn., 2/7)

Terminator Riggz (def. Charlie Norris, Fridley, Minn., 2/11)

Charlie Norris (def. Golden Idol, Shakopee, Minn., 5/11)

Teijo Khan (def. Charlie Norris, Fridley, Minn., 10/14)

Charlie Norris (def. Teijo Khan, Minneapolis, Minn., 11/17)

- (1) Been champion since Sept. 22, 1990 when he defeated Jerry Lynn in Chicago, Ill. Briefly lost the title to Terminator Riggz on Dec. 17, 1990 in Fridley, but the title was stripped three days later after a review of the tape)
- (2) Sub for Terminator Riggz

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Steve Berg & Tim Hunt (def. Texas Hangmen)

J.R. Carson & Jamie Magnum [The Punishers] (def.

Steve Berg & Tim Hunt, Minneapolis, Minn. 4/15)

TRI-STATE WRESTLING ALLIANCE

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

J.T. Smith, (def. D.C. Drake, Philadelphia, Pa. 8/3)
Buddy Landell (Def. J.T. Smith, Pine Hill, N.J., 10/26)

- (1) Six-man elimination match with Drake losing the belt to whomever could possibly pin him.
(2) First champion since Sept. 15, 1990 when he defeated Rockin' Rebel in Philadelphia, Pa.)

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Johnny Hotbody & Larry Winters, (def. Rockin' Rebel & Jimmy Janetty in tournament final, Philadelphia, Pa., 5/18)
Blackhearts (def. D.C. Drake & Johnny Hotbody, Philadelphia, Pa., 9/21)

- (1) First champions.
(2) Allowed to sub for Injured Winters.

VIRGINIA WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Nicky Hawks (def. Jeff Collett, Richmond, Va., 4/5)
Agent Orange (def. Nicky Hawks, Amelia, Va., 10/19)

- (1) Been champion since Dec. 7, 1990 when he defeated Sam Houston in Pennington Gap, Va.

JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Jimmy Jaguar (def. Eliminator #3, Richmond, Va., 2/8)
Agent Orange (def. Jimmy Jaguar, Richmond, Va., 4/5)
Mick Justice (def. Agent Orange, South Hill, Va., 7/6)

- (1) Been champion since Dec. 7, 1990 when he defeated Nicky Hawks in Pennington Gap, Va.

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Jeff Collett & Stan Lane [New Midnight Express] (def. Dave Casanova & Rip Sawyer, Richmond, Va., 4/19)
Dave Casanova & Rip Sawyer [Cream Team] (def. Jeff Collett & Stan Lane, Staunton, Va., 11/15)
Thunderfoot I & II (def. Dave Casanova & Rip Sawyer, Fredericksburgh, Va., 11/16)

- (1) Been champions since Nov. 18, 1990 when they defeated Johnny Rotten & Rommy Rose in Richmond, Va.

SOUTH ATLANTIC PRO WRESTLING

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Vince Torelli (def. Chris Chavis, tournament final, Nassau, Bahamas, 2/7/91)
Chris Chavis (def. Vine Torelli, Penbrooke, N.C., 7/6)
Manny Fernandez, (def. Chris Chavis, Penbrooke, 8/31)

- (1) Previous champion was Robert Fuller who defeated Paul Jones in Greensboro, N.C. on Sept. 29, 1990 to win belt. Belt held up following controversy.
(2) Stripped of belt after being "suspended". Tournament set for Jan. 11, 1992 in Roseboro, N.C.

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

StormTroopers (def. Bobby & Jackie Fulton, Albermarle, N.C., 8/22)

the promotion's eyes as the number two babyface, although Justice's matches against Undertaker were lackluster. Justice soon was injured and possibly at that time the promotion wished Warrior was still around.

Nonetheless, one of the "wrestlers of the future" just two years ago and the WWF World Champion when the year started, ended the year completely severed from the business.

8.

WWF BEGINS STEROID TESTING

On July 12, the WWF issued a press release announcing they would expand their current testing program to include steroid testing. It was an attempt to soothe the mainstream media into thinking the WWF was serious about addressing the steroid issue. Vince McMahon went on USA Network on "Prime Time Wrestling" the following Monday and announced to the viewers that the WWF would begin steroid testing.

The media attention virtually disappeared. No testing took place.

Over four months later, one day before "Entertainment Tonight" and two days before "Inside Edition" planned to criticize the WWF for being all talk, no action on their steroid policy, the WWF held their first tests. But Nov. 14 and 15, Superstar Graham, Bruno Sammartino, and others criticized the WWF for their empty policy. The fact that the WWF began testing was just a footnote on the stories. The steroid issue was back in the media's eye and the WWF lost credibility for taking so long to administer the first test.

For the rest of the year, there were one or two other tests, although the WWF never released the results as they at one time promised. No one was suspended specifically for failure of a steroid test, and the biggest, most muscular of WWF wrestlers were still in the promotion - as big as ever.

The tests were either extremely beatable or the rules of testing were too lenient. Either way, steroid use had only decreased slightly, according to many observers with bodybuilding backgrounds and no one publicly gave the WWF credit for having "the most comprehensive steroid testing policy in all of professional sports and entertainment" - well, except those affiliated with the WWF.

But the fact that the WWF began steroid testing was news, despite appearing to only be an empty public-relations move.

As 1992 got under way, it appeared the WWF would either have to start suspending some wrestlers publicly for failing tests or wrestlers were going to have to get smaller. Otherwise, the media pressure would return and probably without much sympathy for the WWF the third time around.

9.

GRAHAM GOES PUBLIC ABOUT STEROIDS IN PRO WRESTLING

Without the physical deterioration of Wayne Coleman, known in wrestling

as "Superstar" Billy Graham, a lot of wrestlers and promoters could have brushed the steroid controversy aside by claiming there was no evidence that steroids are necessarily bad.

Many still brushed the issue aside, saying Graham's condition was an exception or it was not due to steroids, but the media did not brush it aside.

Graham's story of intense steroid abuse in the 70s and 80s, his tales of physical and psychological addiction to steroids and pain killers was a perfect centerpiece for mainstream stories and effective court testimony.

Graham's testimony in the Zahorian trial probably had great influence on the jury believing Zahorian selling wrestlers steroids without giving them physicals or medically justifying their use was wrong. Graham's story made it to CBS morning news, several sensationalistic syndicated news programs, wrestling radio programs across the country, and many newspaper articles. His misfortune with steroids was considered a foreshadow of things to come for what is estimated to be 90 percent of today's wrestlers. Of those, a large percentage use steroids to very heavy degrees and could face the same consequences ten year from now that Graham is facing today.

In the Pro Wrestling Torch 1990 Yearbook, after Graham had just scratched the surface of the media, I wrote, "1990's biggest story in retrospect may be Superstar Graham's public denouncement of steroid use... Ten years from now, that could be looked at as the story of the year." The same can be said today, but with a lot more confidence.

Without Graham, Zahorian's trial may not have been the top story of the year, Hogan would not have gone on Arsenio, and the mainstream media might not have covered steroids in pro wrestling with nearly the level of scrutiny they did in 1991. In that respect, when the story of the 1990's is written eight years from now, the "Superstar" Graham story may be the biggest - the one that changed the face of professional wrestling for years to come.

10.

GLOBAL WRESTLING FEDERATION FORMS

It could have been a bigger story had Joe Pedicino been backed with \$25 million dollars, a number originally given out by him and spouted off by the wrestling media at every opportunity.

The formation of a number three promotion on ESPN booked by Eddie Gilbert should have been a top three story of the year. It wasn't. Something didn't click.

Pedicino revealed in November 1990 that he had purchased the USWA and its syndicated network from Jerry Jarrett. The deal was on, then off, on, then off. By summer, many had given up on the GWF ever actually forming.

But the deal was finally struck, and with a lot less backing than originally bragged about, the GWF held their first events on June 28 and 29 at the Dallas Sportatorium, renamed the "GlobalDome" to project a less regional image. The GWF took over the USWA's syndicated network in over 100 markets and began airing each weekday afternoon on ESPN.

On their first two nights the GWF held a TV Title tournament which included Buddy Landell, Mahan Singh, Chris Walker, Rip Rogers, Big Bully Busich, Gary Young, Black Bart, Bill Irwin, Terry Garvin, Adrian Street, Rasta the Voo Doo Mon, Randy Rhodes, Sweet Daddy Falcone, Stan Lane with Jim Comette, The Patriot, and a few others. The Patriot came out the winner, defeating Landell in the finals.

From there, Chris Walker & Steve Simpson won the GWF Tag Team Title Tournament, Lightning Kid won the GWF Light Heavyweight Tournament,

Tommy Angel & Tommy Seabolt (def. Storm Troopers, Lincolnton, N.C., 10/13)

(1) Been champion since Dec. 29, 1990 when they defeated the Pit Bulls in Greenville, S.C.

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

IWGP WORLD CHAMPION

Big Van Vader, (def. Tatsumi Fujinami, Yokohama, 1/17)

Tatsumi Fujinami (def. Big Van Vader, Hirshima, 3/4)

(1) Became champion on Dec. 26, 1990 by defeating Riki Choshu in Hamamatsu

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Norio Honaga (def. Jushin Liger in tournament final, Ryoku, 4/30)

Jushin Liger (def. Norio Honaga, Tokyo, 6/12)

Akira Nogami (def. Jushin Liger, Tokyo, 8/9)

Akira Nogami (def. Jushin Liger, Tokyo, 8/9)

Norio Honaga (def. Akira Nogami, Tokyo, 11/5)

IWGP TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Hiroshi Hase & Kensuke Sasaki, (def. Hiro Saitoh & Super Strong Machine, Nagasaki, Japan)

Rick & Scott Steiner (def. Hiroshi Hase & Kensuke Sasaki, Nagasaki, 3/6)

Hiroshi Hase & Keiji Mutoh (def. Scott Norton & Rick Steiner, Norton subbing for injured Scott Steiner, Tokyo, 11/5)

(1) Been champions since defeated Hase & Sasaki in Hamamatsu.

ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

TRIPLE-CROWN CHAMPION

Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Stan Hanse, Nagano, 1/19)

(1) Been champion since July 27, 1990 when he defeated Mitsuhiro Misawa for vacant title in Yamagata, Japan.

ASIAN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Dynamite Kid & Johnny Smith (def. Tsyuoshi & Kenta Kobashi, Osaka, 4/6)

Doug Furnas & Dan Kroffat (def. Dynamite Kid & Johnny Smith, Tokyo, 4/20)

Johnny Ace & Kenta Kobashi (Def. Furnas & Kroffat, Tokyo, 7/8)

Billy Black & Joel Deaton (def. Johnny Ace & Kenta Kobashi, Tokyo, 7/15)

Doug Furnas & Dan Kroffat (def. Billy Black & Joel Deaton, Tokyo, 7/26)

(1) Been champions since defeating Bobby Fulton & Tommy Rogers in tournament final in Fukui on Sept. 8, 1990.

TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS

Stan Hansen & Dan Spivey (def. Terry Gordy & Steve Williams, Tokyo, 4/18)

Terry Gordy & Steve Williams (def. Stan Hansen & Dan Spivey, Tokosuka, 7/6)

Toshiaki Kawada & Mitasuhara Misawa (def. Terry Gordy & Steve Williams, Kanazawa, 7/24)

(1) Been champions since defeating Hansen & Spivey in tournament in Tokyo on Dec. 7, 1990.

and The Patriot won the GWF North American Heavyweight Title.

The GWF's biggest asset might have been Lightning Kid, who more than anyone else, made the GWF look different from the other promotions, given his smaller size and high flying dare-devil moves. His matches against Chaz and Jerry Lynn were often very good. Cactus Jack and Scotty "The Body" Anthony were the GWF's other two unique assets, but Jack joined WCW soon after the GWF's inception and Anthony was underutilized on commentary, his strongest quality.

The main angle for the first few months of the GWF was the formation of "The Cartel", originally Makhan Singh, Cactus Jack, Rip Rogers, and Scott Anthony. The leader of the group was a mysterious unnamed person called "The Boss". Originally it was supposed to be Scandar Akbar, but that idea got scratched and eventually it was decided it would be on-air "GWF Commissioner" Max Andrews. But Andrews, one of the financial backers, apparently ran into some problems doing legitimate business with his syndicated company as some people he had to deal with took his heel turn on TV seriously. Thus the angle was scrapped the next week, he was turned babyface, and soon who the Boss was became a moot point.

Eddie Gilbert was brought in, originally as a wrestler, but soon he became booker. He was a shot in the arm, and combined with Scott Anthony, Terry Garvin, and The Patriot, the GWF had enough talent to be a legitimate "number three promotion". The unpredictability of Gilbert's angles kept the pacing of the promotion solid and often exciting.

But overall, the GWF lacked the mainstream talent it needed to be taken seriously by wrestling fans, especially fans outside of the South who labelled it a southern regional promotion based on the heavy accents of the fans who were interviewed and Bonnie Blackstone and based on the familiar USWA faces found in most of the matches.

A few ventures into house show business proved to not be profitable and by the end of the year, the GWF was simply a television promotion using mostly Texas-based talent, highlighted by an occasional Scott Anthony interview or Eddie Gilbert angle. The future of the GWF is unpredictable, but with a solid syndicated network and an ESPN contract, the GWF is expected by most to be around for a while to come, although not as major of an influence as some thought originally possible.

11-50

NBC cancelling the WWF due to poor ratings was a big story, somewhat lessened by FOX granting the WWF a special early in 1992. Wrestlemania bombing on pay-per-view at first looked like a shoe-in for a top ten story, and in a way it was in that it was closely tied to #4, the exploitation of the war. The Wrestlemania location change was the first major sign of overambition by the WWF since they tried to fill three buildings for Wrestlemania II. The change in location also foreshadowed the public backlash against story #4. WCW's arena attendance was what kept morale low all year, not to mention cost WCW a lot of money. Flair's 7th Title win was not only historical, but signified the failure of Sting as the man to carry the torch for the next decade. Sid Eudy jumping to the WWF turned into one of Wrestlemania's main events. At the time, it was a major loss for WCW image-wise. Portland was one of the two remaining full-time regional promotions, the last of the NWA affiliates. The WWF experiment of two PPVs in one week tested PPV potential. Without Phil Mushnick's critical coverage of the WWF, steroid testing might never have happened. Undertaker's short reign showed the WWF's need to hotshot an angle involving their belt which they generally have not done. When the National Sports Daily stopped publishing, so did Dave Meltzer's column. One can only imagine the impact the National could have had on the nine months leading to March 1992's "TitanGate". Hogan winning the title for the third time was due to a lack of viable options, a sign of desperate times in the WWF. Hogan's movie "Suburban Commando" flopping showed his mainstream appeal was vastly overrated. The Bash's total lack of excitement and direction was a lowpoint for WCW. The establishment of the Light Heavyweight division, albeit totally mismanaged and underplayed, was a positive step.

Rude and Steamboat were a shot in the arm for WCW. Another Von Erich dying is testimony to the pressures and problems of that family. WCW had little to do with it, but took credit for selling out the Tokyo Egg Dome. Jushin Liger debuting in America after so many raved about him - combined with him getting over with the fans - showed the move was long overdue. Justice's injury not only raised questions about making him the replacement for Hulk Hogan, but it forced Randy Savage, who was reluctant to re-enter the ring, out of retirement. Scott Steiner showed against Ric Flair he was not ready to be a top singles star as his skills and conditioning were well below expectations. Dick the Bruiser never faded from the scene and he was one of the great brawlers of all-time. WCW getting the Meadowlands dates was their chance to shed the regional image. Their failure to draw led to expectations they would lose their only New York area outlet in 1992. Slaughter winning the WWF Title, given his physical condition and drawing power, showed desperation on the WWF's part to force feed fans someone they did not care about. Fujinami's victory was a positive early step toward more Japan-U.S. wrestling relations. McMahon's on-camera involvement in an angle has been rare. Gilbert was a shot in the arm for the GWF, although the resources he had to work with were limited. Scott Steiner's injury was a blow the faltering WCW did not need.

The WWF's cooperation with SWS did not impact this country, but was another step to reestablishing a relationship with Japan. LOD winning the WWF tag titles after previously winning the WCW/NWA and AWA belts was unprecedented. Luger's WCW Title victory was regarded by many as a promotional mistake. Cactus brightened a lot of WCW events at a time when they needed it. Sports Illustrated shilling for McMahon with a major puff piece was almost meaningless by the time Mushnick and others finished with their legitimate coverage, but the fact that S.I. had not responded with another story - this time well-researched - is baffling. Savage and Elizabeth's wedding bombed live, but was the focus of the promotion for a few months. The end of the "Four Horsemen" marked the end of an era in WCW of the Horsemen run-ins and the Horsemen being the focus of the promotion. Cactus vs. Gilbert, as the awards on the previous page attest, sparked interest all over the country despite no television coverage. The Globe's article on Ultimate Warrior could have been damaging. The fact that there was little reaction to it showed either people did believe the tabloid or they did not care about Ultimate Warrior. Herb Abrams's attempt at promoting the UWF pay-per-view showed that PPV was not a sure-fire way to make millions; you also needed fan interest. Eddie Mansfield's ability to return to the wrestling business after his early-80s expose' of pro wrestling on "20/20" showed how much more open the wrestling business had become.

JAPAN JOURNEY

A 1991 RETROSPECTIVE

BY CHRIS ZAVISA, TORCH'S JAPANESE WRESTLING COLUMNIST

Those of you who follow professional wrestling in Japan hold in your hands an in-depth encyclopedia covering the entire year of Japanese pro wrestling. Use it as a reference for years to come. For those of you who usually turn the page whenever Japanese wrestling is covered might find it worthwhile to invest some time into reading this article.

After reading this in-depth review of 1991, you will learn enough about that foreign product to understand it and follow it to a greater degree. As Jushin Liger, Hiro Hase, Keiji Muto (Great Muta), Tatsumi Fujinami, and other wrestlers travel to this continent more often, there is not a better way to prepare yourself.

Nineteen-ninety-one was an exceptional year for North American fans of Japanese wrestling. Once upon a time, not too many years ago, a fan had to look long and hard for the few select tape traders with Japanese connections. When you found a reliable source, you considered yourself very lucky to part with your twenty dollars for four hours of Japanese wrestling that was two to four months old. And then, your source probably missed an occasional show or two causing gaps in your viewing. Clarity of the tapes was sometimes a problem, as tapes were often third or fourth generation versions and some people even edited them.

But in the last two years the Japanese incursion into the American and societal fiber has been significant. There are now scores of stores around the country that cater to Japanese persons who have immigrated to the States. Most of these stock the weekly TV wrestling shows and will order a variety of wrestling publications for you as well. Usually the TV shows are only two weeks old and the tapes are originals taped right off the Japanese airwaves. The store that I frequent, Japan Book Center in Livonia, Mich., is conveniently located next to a Japanese restaurant and a Japanese grocery store. Every Saturday I pick up my weekly tape, a copy of *Weekly Pro Wrestling* magazine and often read it while awaiting my order of chirashi at the restaurant. And who says you have to die to get to Heaven?

For most of 1991, the wrestling news in America was dominated by events outside of the ring. The growing awareness of the steroid problem, so clearly captured in the Dr. Zahorian trial, seemed to garner more attention than anything else. Ric Flair's departure from WCW and his subsequent arrival in the WWF garnered tons of fan attention, but proved to be another example to reality falling far short of the hype.

In Japan, the focus is on wrestling - the action in the ring. From the standpoint of behind-the-scenes news, it was a very dull,

uneventful year. But, if you focus on the action within the ring, it was one of the best years ever.

Both major men's promotions - Giant Baba's All Japan Pro Wrestling and Antonio Inoki's New Japan Pro Wrestling - had stupendous years both in the quality of their product and at the box office. For both, it was a year where almost everything they did turned to gold. It was a year when most of the smaller promotions showed growth and financial success. It was a great year to be a wrestler in Japan. Any Japanese wrestler who could not make a living in 1991 certainly could not be looking very hard for a job with twelve different promotions all competing for talent. Several American grapplers who sometimes work for \$25 at county fairs even had Japanese tours on the smaller circuits.

This "Japan Journey: A 1991 Retrospective" is written in three main sections. First, there is a month-by-month calendar of the big cards, matches, or events that occurred. Second, there is an over-all analysis of the year for each specific promotion. Third, there are a series of smaller sections, or "side bars," as they are

called - which give you some factual information without elaborate explanation. If you put it all together, you get what 1991 was like in the Land of the Rising Sun.

DATELINE JAPAN:

JANUARY

After the December closing of the UWF, its major stars split up and reform into three different groups headed by Akira Maeda, Nobuhiko Takada, and Yoshiaki Fujiwara.

1/4 & 1/5: All Japan Women start out the year with two incredible matinees at Japan's version of wrestling heaven - Tokyo Korauken Hall. Six bouts were judged as four stars or better with a title bout between champion Bull Nakano and Akira Hokuta hitting the top of the five-star scale.

1/8: Tsuyahashi: After a rather mediocre SWS card, star Genichiro Tenryu throws a chair at a fan who yells "New Japan is better."

1/11: Aja Kong and Bison Kimura lose a tremendous hair vs. hair match against Bull Nakano and Kyoko Inoue and get their locks shaved.

1/15: Korakuen Hall: All Japan presents two great bouts - Kawada pins Tase in a wild brawl and in what would set the tone for the entire year, Misawa & Kawada & Kikuchi defeated Tsuruta & Inoue & Fuchi in 22:17 when Kobashi pinned Fuchi after a moonsault.

1/17: Yokohama - New Japan: Big Van Vader pins Tatsumi Fujinami to win the

IWGP World title in 12:57.

1/19: Matsumoto - All Japan: Jumbo Tsuruta reclaims the Triple Crown titles pinning Stan Hansen in 15:49 in a mediocre bout.

1/24: Bull Nakano defeats Yumiko Hotta using a leg drop off the top of the cage to keep her WWA title.

1/27: Korakuen Hall - Tokyo: In a potential match-of-the-year, Tsuruta & Taue & Fuchi defeat Misawa & Kawada & Kikuchi in a 24 minute bout when Taue pins Kawada.

FEBRUARY

2/11: Korakuen Hall: JWP Harley Saito wins the smaller of the women promotion's World title defeating Miss A.

2/12: Tokyo - New Japan: Holding a show in a circus tent next to the Tokyo Egg Dome, New Japan puts on a crowd pleasing show that features Hase & Sasaki & Kido defeating Fujinami & Koshinaka & Iizuka in 14:46 when Kido gets a pinfall over Iizuka.

2/22: Korakuen Hall - SWS: Masao Orihara dazzles fans with his moonsault flip off the top turnbuckle splashing onto Kenichi Oya standing on the arena floor. In the best SWS match to date, Tenryu & Ishikawa defeat Kitao & Kabuki in a stiff contest before a hardcore crowd.

2/23: Tokyo: New Japan star Keichi Yamada, otherwise known as Jushin "Thunder" Liger, gets married in a splashy event held at Keio International Plaza Hotel.

2/26 & 2/27: Korakuen Hall: FMW promotes two very successful shows with Soviet wrestler Grigory Veritchev knocking out Atsushi Onita to win their Martial Arts World title.

2/26: Sendai - All Japan: Another potential match-of-the-year with Tsuruta & Fuchi winning over Kobashi & Kikuchi with the youngsters taking tons of stiff punishment. In a PWF World Tag Team title bout, Mitsuha Misawa is knocked out cold after Terry Gordy powerbombs him on the arena floor.

MARCH

3/1: Suwa - New Japan: Tiger Jeet

Singh destroys Hiroshi Hase's car (passed off to fans as belonging to booker Riki Choshu) using a baseball bat. Singh then gives an over-the-top interview vowing to kill Choshu's children.

3/3: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: Tsuruta & Taue & Fuchi defeat Misawa & Kawada & Kobashi when Taue pins Kobashi in a 30 minute, five-star match.

3/4: Hiroshima - New Japan: Fujinami pins Vader to retake his IWGP World title in a 13 minute contest.



BIG VAN VADER

3/6: Nagasaki - New Japan: Hase & Sasaki rise to prominence with a IWGP World Tag Team title victory over Hiro Saito and Super Strong Machine.

3/7 to 3/14: Universal has its Lucha Libre tour doing five shows at Korakuen Hall and only three in other cities.

3/17: Korakuen Hall - All Japan Women: At a sold out matinee show, Noriyo Tateno retires after defeating Takako Inoue. Tateno takes several good-bye blows from Lioness Asuka, Dump Matsumoto and Jaguar Yokota. Suzuka Minami wins the All Pacific title from Manami Toyota in a tremendous 16 minute contest. Debbie Drake debuts as Debbie Malenko replacing Madusa Miceli. It was a big day at Korakuen for the women as JWP sold out their evening show.

3/21: Tokyo Egg Dome - New Japan: Inoki's boys combine with WCW, still called the NWA in Japan, to sell out all 64,600 seats and puts on a four-hour show. Jushin Lyger takes the IWGP Jr. Title strap from Akira Nogami, Rick & Scott Steiner take the Tag belts from Hase & Sasaki, Choshu keeps his children and defeats Singh in a wild bloodbath, and Tatsumi Fujinami wins (or does he?) the NWA World title by defeating Ric Flair.

3/23: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: In yet another potential match-of-the-year, Tsuruta & Taue & Fuchi defeats Misawa & Kobashi & Kikuchi in 27 minutes as Kikuchi gets pinned.

3/26: Chichibu - All Japan: On his first tour of Japan, Cactus Jack wrestles one of the world's best, Jumbo Tsuruta. The *Japanese Wrestling Journal* reports that Jack actually carried Tsuruta to a good match.

3/28: Korakuen Hall: FMW holds one of their best shows with the main event featuring a great, out of control brawl with Onita & Goto & Asako defeating Pogo & Gladiator & Gran Mendoza.

3/30: Tokyo Egg Dome: SWS combines with Titan Sports WWF to pack over 50,000 seats although only approximately 20,000 paid to get in. In the main event, Hawk & Animal beat legends Hulk Hogan & Genichiro Tenryu via countout. The show was rated as mediocre.

APRIL

New Japan runs a "Top of the Super Junior II" tournament all month featuring the best of their lighter stars plus imports Owen Hart, Negro Casas, and Chris Benoit wrestling as Pegasus Kid.

Gong Magazine and *Weekly Pro Wrestling* diverge, taking opposite sides in the coverage of Megame Optical's SWS promotion. Owner Hachiro Tanaka bans *Weekly Pro* from its cards saying it was intentionally presenting SWS stories in a negative light. *Gong* goes overboard to praise SWS cards and repeatedly gives inflated attendance figures.

4/1: Kobe - SWS: After losing a match to John Tenta, Koji Kitao grabs the house mic and exposes the business calling



TATSUMI FUJINAMI

professional wrestling fake. Other wrestlers quickly grab the mic from him and usher him back to the locker room where he is fired.

4/4: Sendai - All Japan Women: Aja Kong & Bison Kimura team to win the WWA World Tag Team title belts beating Hotta and Hokuta.

4/8: Budokan Hall - All Japan: For one of the year's best cards, All Japan sells 15,960 tickets in advance. Tsuruta pins Misawa, Hansen & Spivey win the PWF World Tag Titles from Gordy & Williams, Taue beats Kawada, and Kenta Kobashi pins Dan Kroffat despite wrestling with broken ribs.

4/16: Nagoya - All Japan: Jumbo Tsuruta pins Stan Hansen in the finals of the All Japan Carnival Tournament leaving no doubt in anyone's mind who was the top wrestler in the promotion.

4/19: Okinawa Island: New Japan sells over 11,000 tickets doing four spot shows in as many days on Japan's version of the Florida Keys. The best match has Negro Casas pinning Jushin Lyger.

4/20 Korakuen Hall - All Japan - On one of their periodic Fan Appreciation Nights, All Japan regulars witnessed one of the longest bouts since the Inoki vs. Brody

60 minute draw. Misawa & Kawada & Kobashi beat Tsuruta & Taue & Fuchi in 51:32. The bout was filled with non-stop, stiff action mixed in with plenty of crowd pleasing high spots. After the bout ended, the crowd remained behind chanting the names of the participants and even that of Giant Baba.

4/21: Korakuen Hall - All Japan Women: The Moreno sisters win the Japanese tag title belts defeating Shimoda & Mita.

4/29: Tokyo Ota Ward Gym - All Japan Women: Akira Hokuta wins the All Pacific title defeating Suzuka Minami in a great 21 minute bout. Bull Nakano keeps her World Title defeating over-sized import Monster Ripper.

4/30: Tokyo Sumo Hall - New Japan: On the final night of the Junior Tournament, Norio Honaga pins Pegasus Kid, Liger wins by submission over Casas, and, in a real surprise, Norio Honaga wins both the tournament and the IWGP Jr. title by pinning Liger in a 22 minute bout. On the same card, Choshu and Fujinami team together to defeat Hase and Sasaki in one of the year's best tag bouts not in All Japan rings.

MAY

5/6: Osaka - FMW: In an outdoor spectacular, FMW starts out the month with a bang in front of 7,883 fans, Atsushi Onita defeats Mr. Pogo in a bizarre and bloody Barbed Wire & Exploding Mine match. Even Pogo's manager, Victor Quinones, falls victim to the pyrotechnics.

5/6: Korakuen Hall - New Japan: The year's best men's singles bout occurs at a New Japan Fan Appreciation night as Hiroshi Hase pins Jushin Lyger in a tremendous 28 minute match. The bout is not taped for TV or cassette, but survives today filmed by a fan with a hand-held camera.

5/11: Yokohama - Rings: Akira Maeda goes it alone with no other major Japanese talent and sells 11,000 seats at the 17,000 capacity Ice Arena. Maeda defeats Holland import Dirk Vrij.

5/15: Omiya - FMW: After apologizing to Onita earlier on the card, Mr. Pogo reverses his turn and spits fire into Onita's face to rekindle their feud. Onita makes his weekly trip to the hospital.

5/16: Korakuen Hall - Fujiwara-GUMI: In one of the years best UWF strong-style

JAPAN'S BIGGEST CARDS OF 1991

Based on paid attendance. Does not include freebies, which reduce SWS cards considerably, particularly their two Tokyo Dome shows. S.O. after the number means the card was totally sold out. Est. means the paid attendance is an estimate since a large portion of the crowd did not pay or the exact figure was not available at press time.

1. 63,900 New Japan at the Tokyo Egg Dome on March 21. S.O.
2. 48,221 FMW in Tosu on Aug. 17.
3. 33,221 FMW in Kawasaki on Sept. 23.
4. 30,000 est. SWS at the Tokyo Egg Dome on Dec. 12.
5. 25,000 - 30,000 est. SWS at the Tokyo Egg Dome on March 30.
6. 19,200 est. All Japan at Budokan Hall plus closed-circuit site on Dec. 6. s.o.
7. 18,000 New Japan in Yokohama on Sept. 23. s.o.
8. 15,960 All Japan at Tokyo Budokan Hall on April 18. s.o.
9. 15,960 All Japan at Tokyo Budokan Hall on June 1. s.o.
10. 15,650 All Japan at Tokyo Budokan Hall on Sept. 4. s.o.
11. 14,500 New Japan at Osaka Castle on May 31. s.o.
12. 14,014 New Japan at Tokyo Budokan Hall on June 12.
13. through 17. New Japan sold out Sumo Hall on four occasions, April 30, August 9, 10, and 11. Initial reports indicate that the UWFI also sold out Sumo Hall on Dec. 22.
18. through 20. Several promotions had crowds of 11,000 including RINGS on May 11 in Yokohama, New Japan on Aug. 7 in Nagoya, and SWS on Aug. 9 in Yokohama. Only the New Japan card was sold out.

bouts, Naoki Sano defeats Wayne Shamrock via submission in a solid 2 minute contest.

5/24: Sapporo - All Japan: Continuing the heat from the long six man tag feud Jumbo Tsuruta and Kenta Kobashi have one of the promotions best singles bouts as Jumbo pins the youngster in 22:23. On the same card Misawa continues his big push pinning Steve Williams in a tag match.

5/26: Korakuen Hall - All Japan

Women: One of the year's best cards from top to bottom has Manami Toyota and Aja Kong battling to a thrilling 30 minute draw, plus at least four other bouts register in the four star or better range. The show was released on cassette for home video.

5/29: Tokyo Ward Gym - FMW: In front of 5,235 adoring fans, Atsushi Onita reclaims the FMW World Martial Arts title defeating Grigory Veritchev in a bout with an ending right out of Rocky II.

5/31 Osaka - New Japan - Inoki's promotion sells out the 14,500 seat Osaka Castle for the big Tatsumi Fujinami 20th Anniversary card. The Steiners defeat Hase & Sasaki, Fujinami successfully defends the IWGP strap by defeating Masa Chono and even dives through the ropes recalling the aerial tactics of his junior heavyweight days.

JUNE

6/1: Budokan Hall - All Japan: 15,960 fans cram Tokyo's Budokan to witness the comeback of legend Giant Baba after suffering a broken leg in the 1990 tag tournament. Best bouts on the card had Kroffat & Furnas keeping the Asian Tag titles defeating Wonderkids, Kikuchi & Kobashi. And clearly solidifying his claim as the main rival to Tsuruta, Mitsuhara Misawa gets a pinfall victory over Terry Gordy.

6/1: SWS owner Hachiro Tanaka takes a giant step toward improvement naming Genichiro Tenryu as the group's president.

6/7: Sumo Hall - SWS: New booker and president, Genichiro Tenryu, signals a new direction for his criticized promotion, putting on a crowd pleasing show despite selling only 3,000 tickets in the cavernous hall.

6/10: Nagoya - SWS: Tenryu's group puts on another decent effort before nearly 8,000 in Nagoya. However, to most hardcore fans, it had become obvious that the undercard bouts with youngsters Ishikriki, Masao Orihara, Hiroshi Hatanaka, and Tatsumi Kitahara regularly stole the show from the bigger and older main eventers.

6/12 Budokan Hall - New Japan - Jushin Lyger defeats Norio Honaga to reclaim the IWGP Jr. title. In typical New Japan fashion, the bout was not shown on national TV.

6/16 A new promotion - WINGS - is announced at a news conference. FMW

refugee, Mr. Pogo, is the group's "big star."

6/18 Sapporo - All Japan Women - World Tag title holders Aja Kong and Bison Kimura retain their belts going 30 minutes defeating Bull Nakano and Kyoko Inoue in a 3 fall bout.

6/21 Sapporo - FMW - perennial punching bag Sambo Asako has his arm ripped open so badly in a barbed wire death match that he had to be hospitalized and received 20 stitches. The cut was said to be so deep that the muscle was visible to ringside observers.

6/21 through 6/29 - New Japan - In a series of small town spot shows, booker Riki Choshu makes his philosophy crystal clear as top stars Liger, Muto and Hase all do clean jobs putting over lesser wrestlers.

6/30 Korakuen Hall - JWP - The "other" women's group packs Korakuen as Yamazaki and Kazama defeat Miss A. and Harley Saito.

JULY

7/3: Korakuen Hal - UWFI: In a sign of the falling fortunes of strong style wrestling, the UWFI fails to sell out Korakuen Hall for a Takada vs. Nakano main event. The disappointing show lasts only 90 minutes.

7/4: Fukuoka - New Japan: Pegasus Kid loses a mask vs. mask bout to Jushin Liger, revealing Chris Benoit. In typical fashion, only a few seconds of it were shown on the New Japan TV show.

7/6: Yokusuka - All Japan: The Summer Action series opens with another great Tsuruta vs. Misawa tag team match plus Hansen and Spivey drop their PWF World Tag belts to Gordy and Williams.

7/7: All Japan Women: A five week long tournament begins to determine the top contender for Bull Nakano's WWA title.

7/18: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: A star is born at the fourth annual Bruiser Brody Memorial Night card as American Billy Black duplicates Oriharas incredible moonsault out of the ring as he and Joel Deaton win the Asian Tag straps from 10 day champions Kobashi & Johnny Ace.

7/20: Yokohama - All Japan: Rising star Kenta Kobashi pays back Stan Hansen by beating up the badman from Borger, Texas so badly that Hansen has to bail out of the ring. Hansen eventually regains control and wins the match but an important message has been sent. When shown on TV, the bout was edited to protect one of their top imports at the expense of a future

JAPANESE SERIES

In the USA, we are used to the major promotions operating nearly every day of the year with one month virtually indistinguishable from the previous one. The only exception is the Great American Bash cards that WCW still emphasizes apart from their usual shows. In Japan, each promotion divides up the year into many smaller series each lasting from one to three weeks. They then take a few weeks off in between. Occasionally, they will work a few sport shows in between the series, most notably the Fan Appreciation Nights that most of the promotions put on several times per year. Here are the various series of the major promotions, their official titles, dates, and the major foreign talent used at that time. For the Universal promotion, I do not list the individual foreign talent since nearly all of their workers are imported from Mexico.

ALL JAPAN 1991 SERIES

New Year Giant Series, 1/2 to 1/27: Hansen, Spivey, Abdullah, Fantastics, Ace, Deaton, Black.

'91 Excite Series, 2/23 to 3/8: Gordy, Williams, Malenko's, Blackharts.

'91 Champion Carnival, 3/23 to 4/18: Hansen, Spivey, Furnas, Kroffat, Funks.

'91 Super Power Series, 5/17 to 6/7: Gordy, Williams, Abdullah, Kimala, Kroffat, Furnas, Hansen, Spivey.

Summer Action Series, 7/6 to 7/26: Hansen, Spivey, Gordy, Williams, Ace, Kroffat, Furnas, Fantastics, Malenko's, Rude, Deaton, Black.

Summer Action Series II, 8/17 to 9/7: Hansen, Spivey, Furnas, Kroffat, Malenko's, Abdullah, Kimala, Blackhearts.

Giant Series, 9/27 to 10/24: Gordy, Williams, Furnas, Kroffat, Dynamite Kid, Malenko's, Hansen, Spivey, Fire Cat.

Real World Tag Team League: 11/16 to 12/6: Andre, Hansen, Spivey, Gordy, Williams, Furnas, Kroffat, Dynamite Kid, J. Smith, Deaton, Black, Abdullah, Kimala II.

superstar.

7/24: Kanazawa - All Japan: Misawa and Kawada win the PWF World Tag belts from Gordy & Williams. Baba was sending another message that very few imports would get a push over his next big star - Misawa.

7/26: Matsudo - All Japan: In closing out a red-hot tour, Tsuyoshi Kikuchi steals the show in another stupendous Tsuruta vs. Misawa six man tag. Misawa does a clean job for Tsuruta but it is the suicidal bumps of Kikuchi that have the fans talking as they hit the exits.

7/26: Tokyo Bay - Fujiwara/GUMI: SWS owner Tanaka's strong style promotion goes to Tokyo Bak NK Hall and sells 5,000 of the 7,000 available seats. In the main events, Minoru Suzuki and Naoki Sano wrestle to a solid 30 minute draw and Funaki submits to Fujiwara.

7/30: Hakata - UWFI: Returning to one of its strongest cities, disappointment reigns supreme as only half of the seats are sold for a rare strong-style tag team match.

Just one year previously, a UWF card would have sold out the building in record time.

AUGUST

8/1: Osaka - Rings: Akira Maeda's RINGS puts on a brief, sixty minute show in front of a disappointing crowd of 6,100 in Maeda's hometown of Osaka. Maeda lost an eight minute main event to Dirk Vrij of Holland. The bloom was definitely off the UWF rose.

8/1: Shimonoseki - New Japan: While Maeda was losing in Osaka, New Japan

puts on a show in front of 30,000 in connection with a motor boat race in Shimonoseki. Jushin Liger won a 12 man Battle Royal and then lost to Muto in a singles match.

8/7 to 8/11: Sumo Hall: New Japan does business selling over 45,000 seats for three shows at Sumo Hall and a fourth in Nagoya. It features a singles tournament won by Masa Chono over Keiji Muto in the finals. The show marks the passing of the torch to a new generation of stars.

8/9: Yokohama - SWS: Masao Orihara wows a crowd of 11,000 at the SWS first anniversary show by doing two consecutive

moonsault flips out of the ring against Tatsumi Kitahara. The Road Warriors win a tag team tournament.

8/17: Tosu - FMW: Combining wrestling with rock & roll music, FMW sells a record 48,221 tickets as Onita defeats Sambo Asako in a bloody, explosive barbed wire death match.

8/18: Korakuen Hall - All Japan Women: Kyoko Inoue wins the finals of the WWA Grand Prix Tournament upsetting Bison Kimura. On the same card Inoue had to first go through Toshiyo Yamada and Manami Toyota to make it to Kimura. The tournament is thrown upside down when favorite Aja Kong suffers a serious ankle injury and misses two weeks of bouts.

8/18: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: Tsuruta & Taue defeat Misawa & Kobashi in a great 30 minute bout dominated by super stiff action.

8/25: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: Tsuruta & Taue defeat Misawa & Kobashi in a great 30 minute bout dominated by super stiff action.

8/29:

Amagasaki - All Japan: Tsuyoshi Kikuchi steals the show in another great tag match with partner Misawa against Tsuruta & Taue.

8/31: Mita - All Japan Women:

Kyoko Inoue continues her big push winning the IWA women's title pinning American Debbie Malenko in an elimination match.

SEPTEMBER

9/4: Budokan Hall - All Japan: Another in a continuing series of successes for All Japan as they sell out the big hall with Masa Fuchi keeping his Jr. strap defeating Kikuchi. Stan Hansen destroys Kenta Kobashi, and Misawa and Kawada go 26 minutes keeping their World Tag titles as they defeat Tsuruta and Taue.

9/7: Omiya - All Japan Women: Bull

NEW JAPAN 1991 SERIES

New Year Dash, 1/4 to 1/17: Vader, Rambo, TNT, Pegasus Kid.

Super February 91, 2/1 to 2/14: Bigelow, Norton, Axe, Singh, Pegasus Kid.

'91 Big Fight Series, 3/1 to 3/14: Vader, Rotundo, Bad News Brown.

Explosion Tour '91, 4/15 to 4/30: Norton, Samoans, Pegasus Kid, Owen Hart, Negro Casas.

Crush the Super Heavy, 5/25 - 5/31: Vader, Bigelow, Pegasus Kid, TNT.

Summer Struggle, 6/20 to 7/4: Norton, Axe, Brown, Pegasus Kid, Rheingans.

Summer Crush, 7/14 to 7/29: Vader, Bigelow, Samoans, TNT, Singh.

G. I. Climax, 8/7 to 8/11: Vader, Bigelow, Norton, Gigante, Pillman.

Battle Autumn, 9/10 to 9/23: Norton, Samoans, Pegasus, Sting, Simmons, Vader.

Super Grade Tag Team League, 10/5 to 10/18: Vader, Bigelow, Norton, Singh, Samoans, Pegasus.

Tokyo 3 Days Battle, 11/3 to 11/5: Rick Steiner, Norton.

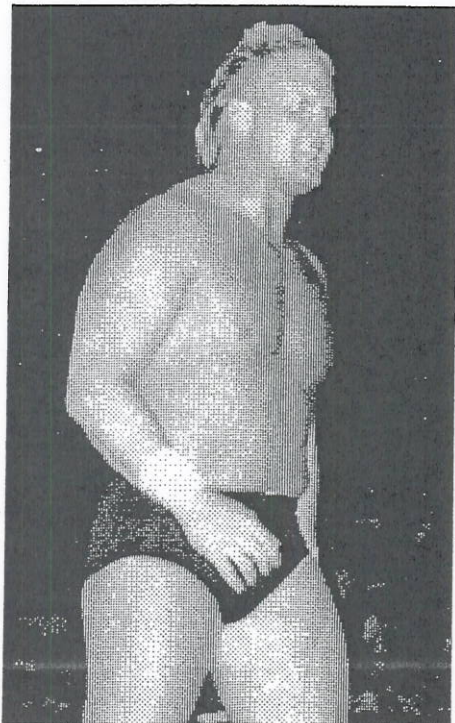
Wrestling Scramble '91, 11/7 to 11/16: Norton, Brown.

Nakano dazzles the crowd by executing a moonsault splash off the top to defeat Kyoko Inoue for the WWA World title. Toshiyo Yamada fights to a thirty minute draw with Manami Toyota.

9/12: Korakuen Hall - Universal: The Mexican group finishes a successful tour of Japan with a crowd pleasing show at a sold out Korakuen Hall. After the show, group president Hisatsune Shinma denied that his local star Yoshihiro Asai was leaving the promotion.

9/14: Sapporo - RINGS: Akira Maeda's group draws the smallest crowd of three UWF style shows in the Nakajima Sports Center, as Maeda beats Willy Wilhelm of Holland.

9/23: Kawasaki - FMW: For the second month in a row, Onita's group has a mega-sized hit on their hands as they sell over 33,000 tickets at the outdoor Kawasaki Baseball Stadium for a big extravaganza. In the main event, Atsushi Onita defeats Tarzan Goto in a no rope, explosive barbed



DAN SPIVEY

wire cage match. The final score had Onita out-stitching Goto 36 to 24 at a local hospital.

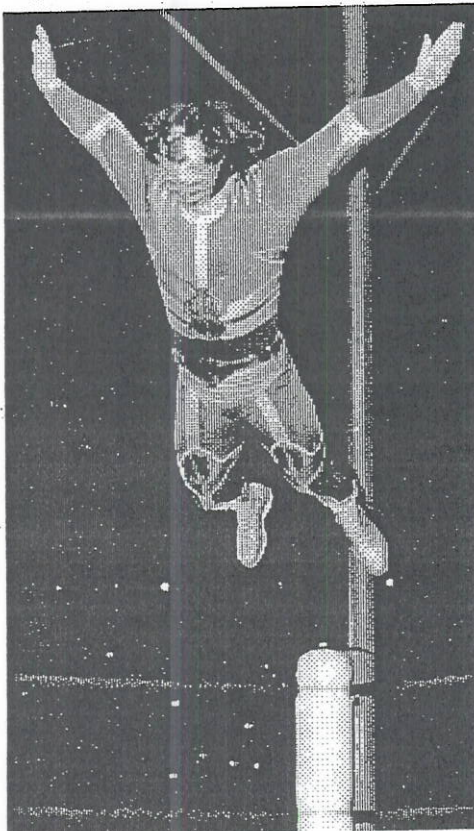
9/26 Sapporo - UWFI - Bob Backlund loses to Nobuhiko Takada in just 75 seconds and nearly prompts a riot.

OCTOBER

10/4: Korakuen Hall - All Japan Women: Kicking off their two month long tag team tournament at Korakuen, Aja Kong & Bison Kimura defeat Inoue & Yamada and Toyota & Mita battle to a 30 minute draw with Yoshinga & Hotta. The All Pacific title changes hands again as Minami pins Hokuta. Former Honey Wing Mika Takahashi has her retirement ceremony.

10/5 to 10/18: New Japan moves its annual tag tournament to October to avoid a conflict with the more popular All Japan edition and some of the year's best tag bouts are seen by very few as network commitments keep New Japan's weekly TV show off the air for four straight weeks. The tourney is eventually won by Fujinami & Vader over Choshu & Masa Saito.

10/7: Yoshihiro Asai officially makes the jump from Universal to SWS in Japan and to EMLL in Mexico. Many fans had long hoped that Asai would end up in New Japan as a foe for Liger.



JUSHIN LIGER

10/10: Korakuen Hall - JWP: Former FMW woman wrestler, buxom Reggie Bennett makes her debut for JWP in a six-woman tag match.

10/10: Nagaoka - All Japan: Another match-of-the-year candidate with guess who? Misawa's team defeats Tsuruta's team in an outstanding six man contest that goes 25 minutes.

10/14: Osaka - All Japan: The stiff style of All Japan is more than evident as Jumbo Tsuruta plasters Misawa's nose across his face after a stiff elbow. Doctors at a local hospital diagnose it as a badly broken nose and Misawa is expected to be out of action for four weeks.

10/15: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: Misawa's four week absence fails to last one day as he shows up to lead partners Kawada & Kikuchi in one of the year's most dramatic bouts against old foes Tsuruta & Taue & Fuchi.

10/17: Korakuen Hall - PWF - The godfather of strong style wrestling, Karl Gotch, attends a PWF show. In honor of Gotch, nearly every wrestler dispenses with their usual karate kicks in favor of mat wrestling. The resulting five match card is charitably described as "boring."

10/25: Korakuen Hall - WINGS: Unlike their earlier appearances, WINGS fails to sell out Korakuen despite packing the card with Mexican wrestlers. The card resembles a Universal show much more than their earlier efforts.

10/26: Toyoma - All Japan Women: Bison Kimura wins the All Pacific title over Suzuka Minami.

10/29: Fukuoka - SWS: A large crowd of 6,870 watches the debut of Asai for SWS. He pins Beastia Salvaje despite hurting his right knee.

NOVEMBER

11/5: Tokyo Budokan Hall - New Japan: A huge crowd of 14,214 witnesses an IWGP World Tag Team title change as Hiro Hase & Keiji Muto team to defeat Rick Steiner & Scott Norton subbing for Scott Steiner. Most of the bout has Hase & Muto taking wicked bumps. Norio Honaga reclaims the IWGP Jr. strap beating Akira Nogami.

11/7: Osaka - UWFI: Takada's promotion gets a sellout as Bob Backlund manages to stick around a lot longer than 75 seconds but still loses to Takada in 16:42. The crowd was one of the better strong style

UNIVERSAL 1991 SERIES

Gran Estrella '91, 3/7 - 3/14.

Super Estrella '91, 6/5 - 6/13.

Fantastico Septiembre '91, 9/5 - 9/12.

Lucha Primera Clase, 11/7 - 11/14.

FMW 1991 SERIES

Bakushin: 1/6 to 1/15: Mr. Pogo, Gladiator, Veritchev, Jimmy Backlund.

Korakuen x 22/26 to 2/27: Veritchev, Pandita.

Ge Ke To Tsu! 3/22 to 3/28: Pogo, Gladiator, Jose Estrada, Gran Mendoza

Senri Tsu! 4/27 to 5/6: Pogo, Gladiator, Horace Boulder, Veritchev.

Sho Ge Kil, 5/15 to 5/29: Veritchev, Backlund, Gladiator, Boulder.

Hokujo-Kessen, 6/15 - 6/30: Bennett, Starr, Boulder.

Shakunetsu-No-Gekitotsu, 7/19 - 8/4: Gladiator, Boulder, Bennett.

Tataikai-No-Banshu, 8/22 to 8/31: Veritchev, Gladiator, Backlund, Boulder.

Kawasaki League, 9/13 to 9/23: Gladiator, Boulder, Veritchev, Backlund, Bennett.

Go West, 10/10 to 10/24: Gladiator, Boulder, Starr, Pandita.

Real World Martial Arts Tag Team League, 11/20 - 12/9: Sheik, Sabu, Leon Spinks, Veritchev.

crowds of the year but still had over 500 empty seats despite the "sellout" claim.

11/16: Korakuen Hall - All Japan: The oldest and most prestigious tag team tournament opens in Tokyo. Misawa & Kawada defeat Hansen & Spivey in a super stiff match.

11/19: WINGS: The WINGS promotion splits into two separate groups. Many felt they were only postponing their eventual demise. One group adopts the name World Martial Arts - WMA.

11/20: Osaka - FMW: Another tag team tourney starts as FMW tries to duplicate All Japan's formula. Favorites are the teams of Onita & Goto and The Sheik (yes, Ed Farhat) & Sabu.

11/21: Kawasaki - All Japan Women: In their biggest card of the year, the Wrestlemarinpiad, Bull Nakano takes firm

control of the front and center position as she goes a combined 80 minutes in two main events in a cage. Nakano & Monster Ripper defeat Aja Kong & Bison Kimura when Ripper splashes Kong and "burst her appendix" in a bloody finish. Then Bull and Ripper went at it for another 34 minutes in the cage until Bull KO'd Ripper. There were several leaps and splashes off the top of the cage. Inoue & Yamada beat Hokuta & Toyota in a great 32 minute tag match.

11/23: Korauken Hall - New Japan: At a special fan appreciation card, Jushin Liger attempts to execute a Frankenstein on Michiyoshi Ohara off the top rope, but both tumble backward to the arena floor. Ohara is knocked cold and stretchered to the dressing room where he later regains consciousness.

11/29 FMW - Ed Farhat proves his versatility as he uses a fire extinguisher to quell a blaze when a fire ball gets away from him.

DECEMBER

12/6: Budokan Hall - All Japan: A sellout crowd of 15,900 plus an additional 3,000 at closed circuit sites see Terry Gordy and Steve Williams win the Real World Tag Team Tournament for the second straight year. They defeat Misawa and Kawada in a 25 minute bout.

12/7: Urayasu - RINGS: Akira Maeda's strong style group turns more to legitimate shoots (at least for the undercard) as Maeda defeats Russian Sambo champ Volk Han before a crowd of over 10,000.

12/8: Korakuen Hall - All Japan Women: In their tag tournament finals, Inoue and Yamada defeat the heel team of Kong & Kimura as Yamada pins Kong. In order to get into the finals Kong & Kimura had to defeat the dream team of Bull Nakano & Akira Hokuto.

12/9: Tokyo Bay - FMW: 6,815 fans watch as Onita & Tarzan Goto win the Tag Tournament defeating Ricky Fuji & Sambo Asako and the Russian entry of Veritchev & Krutanize. FMW's crowd outdrew the last show by New Japan in the same building.

12/10: Tokyo - WINGS: A disappointing crowd of 1,200 gather at Korakuen Hall to see the rebirth of the promotion. Mil Mascaras is brought in and Mr. Pogo turns face.

12/11: Nagoya - New Japan: Jushin Liger gets a rare shot at the IWGP Heavyweight title but gets pinned by

Tatsumi Fujinami in 17 minutes.

12/12: Tokyo Egg Dome - SWS: In a combined show with Titan Sports' WWF, a crowd of 40,000 (of which at most 20,000 paid) watches as local hero Genichiro Tenryu is pinned by the American God of Wrestling - Hulk Hogan. Best bout on the card has Jerry Estrada losing to Yoshinari Asai under a hood as The Ultimate Dragon.

12/18: Ganryujima Island - New Japan: After first journeying to Toronto, Canada, Hiroshi Hase meets Tiger Jeet Singh in Jungle Death Match that lasts well over one hour. It rivals FMW for violence and general weirdness and has Hase the surprising winner.

12/21: Bremen, Germany - New Japan: Big Van Vader reclaims the IWGP World Heavyweight title pinning Tatsumi Fujinami in 22 minutes before a crowd of over 10,000.

12/22: Tokyo Sumo Hall - UWFI: A sellout crowd of over 11,000 nearly riots when Nobuhiko Takada takes less than three minutes to defeat boxer Trevor Berbick, when Berbick bails out after too many hard kicks. The crowd fills the ring with trash.

12/23: Tokyo - WMA: The new other half of the WINGS promotion debuts at a small TV studio using local talent mixed in with Korean karate specialists.

PROMOTIONAL ANALYSIS

1991 was a great year for the Japanese, but some promotions shared in the prosperity a lot more than others. In this section, each promotion is evaluated on their general success over the past year and a brief look forward to what the coming year could be like for them. This is a general overview that summarizes the scheme for the year as opposed to presenting the details which the last section provided. The promotions are listed in order according to their level of success and stature in Japan.

ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

Giant Baba's All Japan started out the year as the number one promotion in the country and only increased their lead over



GIANT BABA

the competition. By every standard of measurement, including financial and athletic, it was a super year for Giant Baba's promotion.

Just as any successful sports organization is made up of a series of components, so too is All Japan. Their dominance of Japanese wrestling is clearly due to the following factors. 1) The front office genius of Shohei Baba who has an orderly plan and direction and follows it. 2) A thorough knowledge of what their fans want and a willingness to give it to them. 3) The best roster of talent in the world. This is true of both Japanese and imported wrestlers. 4) A weekly TV show that almost never gets preempted and always is worth watching. 5) An in-the-ring wrestling product that produces the best matches in the world night after night all over Japan.

In 1991, Baba smiled as he packed the big arenas like Budokan Hall and Osaka Castle while also selling out the smaller spot shows. His TV show completely dominated its time slot and kept national interest very high. His wrestlers had a workrate second to none and he employed a wonderful combination of age and youth. If Baba ever writes a textbook on how to build a successful business, it would be the Bible of the wrestling industry.

Outlook for 1992

All Japan can pick any of a variety of musical cliches to describe their good fortune. "Nobody Does It Better", "Everything's Coming Up Roses", or even

"My Future's So Bright, I've Got To Wear Shades." The year 1992 should be another great one for them. The only thing that could derail them would be a mass defection of talent, especially the trio of Misawa, Kawada, and Kobashi. But that possibility is remote because those three had their opportunity to accept a big-money offer from SWS over a year ago and spurned it.

Baba follows a conservative booking style and that will continue in the coming year. The well planned ascendancy of youth will continue in two areas. First, Mitsuhara Misawa will probably take the unified Triple Crown from Jumbo Tsuruta and become the promotion's number one man. Second, Tsuyoshi Kikuchi will probably take the PWF Jr. strap from Masa Fuchi. Outside of those two moves, there should be no major deviation from the tried and true formula of the past two years. As they often say 'If it's not broke, don't fix it.'

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

If not for the dominance of All Japan, New Japan Pro Wrestling would be the model for wrestling success. They started out and finished the year as number two, but New Japan is certainly not anyone's poor relative. In fact, it is quite possible that they took in more at the gate than All Japan since they had a four million dollar Tokyo Dome show and All Japan did not. They packed arenas all over Japan, from Tokyo to Sapporo to Okinawa Island. Among many of the Tokyo hardcores, New Japan is still their favorite promotion.

Booker Riki Choshu made New Japan an unpredictable promotion. His theory is that fans must feel that in every match, either wrestler can defeat the other. Thus, we had everybody, including all the big name stars, doing clean jobs repeatedly in 1991. Choshu himself set the example by doing three clean jobs at the big August series. The formula worked well and fan interest in the promotion remained very high.

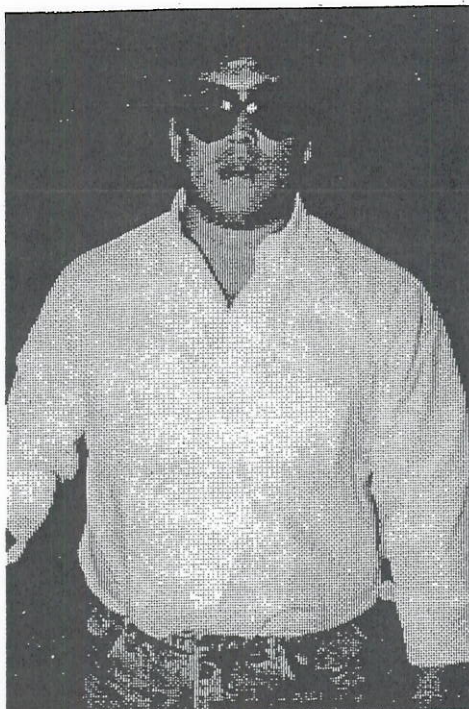
This was the year that youth was served in the person of Muto, Chono, and Hashimoto. They were elevated over the better known veterans at the big August Sumo Hall series. The veterans came back to dominate the October tag team tournament, but the point had been made.

Everyone knew in whose hands the future of the promotion was being placed.

The one negative was the treatment accorded Jushin "Thunder" Liger. Arguably the best small wrestler in the world, Liger did numerous clean jobs for lesser talents, lost his title on two occasions and was rarely seen on national TV.

Outlook for 1991

New Japan should enjoy another banner year in 1992. They start out with a big Tokyo Egg Dome show that has already sold over 55,000 seats and could be another sellout. We will see the continuance of Muto's, Chono's, and Hashimoto's big push



RIKI CHOSHU

to the top. It is possible that by year's end, one of them could be dropped to the middle of the pack as Choshu decides on who his two big guns will be. My guess is that Hashimoto will be the odd man out.

Other changes to look for involve Masa Kurisu and Kim Duk. Both were brought up to the middle of the card to feud against the Blond Outlaws. That feud never generated any real heat and both gimmicks need to be discarded or reworked. Look for Kurisu and Duk to be phased down or even out.

Jushin Liger needs to be put back in a position of prominence and the promotion should find a Dynamite Kid type heel to work a long series with him. Some have mentioned the Minnesota wonderkid - Lightning Kid - as a possible Liger foe, but

it could be a year too early for that.

The one area in which All Japan puts New Japan to shame is the roster of imported talent it uses. New Japan's foreign talent is mediocre compared to the all star team that Baba has. This could be remedied by expanding the talent exchange between World Championship Wrestling and New Japan. Stars like the Steiners, Sting, Luger, Windham, Eaton, Steamboat, Pillman, and Anderson could make more frequent and longer appearances in Japan. In return WCW would greatly benefit by tours from Liger, Hase, Choshu, Muto, and others.

Hopefully, New Japan will exert pressure on the network brass to remedy their TV situation. They need to get a promise of fewer missed TV dates, or at least an alternative time slot when they do get preempted. Keep in mind this has been a running problem for some years now so things may not improve.

ALL JAPAN WOMEN

It was just a few short years ago when the crowds at All Japan Women's cards were dominated by hundreds of shrieking 14 year old girls in their school uniforms. They lived and died with the fortunes of the Crush Girls - Chigusa Nagayo and Lioness Asuka. Dump Matsumoto and her evil army ran roughshod over the promotion and the legions of 14 year-olds shed rivers of tears over their heel tactics. But all three stars are long gone and with them went the groups undeserved reputation as a group that only pubescent girls could love.

All Japan Women has rebuilt very nicely around the talents of Bull Nakano, Akira Hokuto, Manami Toyota, Aja Kong, and a host of supporting characters. They do extremely well in the revenue department packing arenas around Japan. Their annual Wrestling Marinpiad is one of the biggest events of the year for any promotion. They still have a hardcore following - but now it is no longer full of crying teenyboppers, but instead young men in their twenties who flock to their cards. The word is out. Pound for pound, inch for inch, the best wrestling in the entire world is found in the rings of All Japan Women. To borrow a phrase from Madison Avenue, "You've come a long way baby." But somehow referring to Bull Nakano as "baby" sounds akin to volunteering for duty on the bomb squad in Lebanon.

In 1991 All Japan Women did

extremely well in expanding their fan following and generating revenue. The positions for their big stars were solidified with the canonization of Bull Nakano in an eighty minute ceremony at their Third Marinpiad, November 21st in Kawasaki. Bull, with that beautiful ice-blue cracked face paint, is now one of the nation's preeminent athletes. This was also the year that Kyoko Inoue made it to the upper echelons of the group and did so outworking all but a small handful of her fellow wrestlers. They did a great job at introducing new talent in the persons of Debbie Malenko and the Moreno sisters from Mexico. Sake Hasegawa showed that she could be the Tsuyoshi Kikuchi of the promotion with her amazing ability to take wicked beatings at the hands of the bigger women. Their cards on 1/4, 3/17, 5/26, and 11/21 were among the best of any promotion last year. In the States, their videos are among the most sought after by tape traders.

If you are searching for a weakness, it may be in their TV show. The content of the show is unsurpassed, but they only hit on the airwaves once each month causing the promotion to vanish from sight for weeks at a time.

Outlook for 1992

It would be difficult for All Japan Women to show any improvement in the quality of their wrestling this year. When you already have some of the world's best matches, where do you go from there? For two years now, they have carefully rebuilt the promotion and now are in excellent shape. The year 1992 should not be a one of changes or innovation, but instead they will continue to travel along the immensely successful path they have crafted for themselves. They also have the luxury of not having any of their stars reaching the mandatory retirement age of 26 any time soon. Barring some early retirements or heavy injuries, their talent roster should remain intact.

Bull Nakano should again be the rock that anchors the promotion. Much of last year was spent building up to a hair vs. hair match pitting Aja Kong against Nakano, but it was cancelled due to Kong's injuries. They will probably resurrect it this year for a major card.

They should again give fans a tremendous variety of bouts combining the

stiff and fast style of the men's All Japan promotion with the general weirdness of Onita's FMW. Like New Japan, they would greatly benefit by improved TV time, expanding to at least twice a month.

FRONTIER MARTIAL ARTS WRESTLING (FMW)

If anyone would have predicted two years ago that an outlaw promotion headed by Atsushi Onita would today be more popular than promotions headed by Genichiro Tenryu and Akira Maeda, their statement would have been quickly dismissed as sheer ignorance. But that is the situation at the start of 1992. FMW is far more popular than anyone ever could have expected. In fact, Onita recently made a tearful scene when he fell short of duplicating the All Japan crowd in Osaka. A sobbing and raging Onita vowed it would never happen again. Onita's sights are on becoming the number one promotion in Japan. If that dream sounds ridiculous, reread the first sentence of this paragraph for a dose of reality.

Onita's FMW faced a year where some experts predicted its unique appeal would wane as they entered their second year of operations. Critics said that fans would quickly tire of Onita's carnage and his cards made up of no-name, mediocre workers.

The experts were wrong.

Onita had a very successful year with spot shows all over Japan, two mega-hit shows before crowds of 48,000 and 33,000, and more mainstream media attention than any other promotion. FMW was the subject of several TV specials and Onita even filled his own spot as a raging "Dear Abby" advice giver. Onita's "Wild Thing" is approaching the status of a phenomenon.

Ever since Onita first started FMW late in 1989, his roster of talent has been raided by various other promotions. This year, his lead heel, Mr. Pogo, departed and started his own promotion called WINGS. Onita's drawing power remained high and, in fact, increased without Pogo.

It almost goes without saying that 1991 was another year for Onita's trademark formula - liberal doses of blood, sweat and tears. He did just about everything with barbed wire that is humanly possible and a few things that are not. FMW commercial video tapes were a hot item and Onita even

signed a laserdisc deal. Some criticized him for showing up at cards in expensive limos and hand crafted suits, but his fans seemed to love it. The only thing that really prevents Onita from an all out assault on the big two is a talent roster that is one of the barest of all Japanese promotions. FMW has been notoriously cheap with a buck. That Scrooge-like quality has permitted them to be raided and prevented them from getting big names to work programs with Onita. Until that changes, Onita can cry all the tears he wants, but Giant Baba and Antonio Inoki can sleep easy at night.

Outlook for 1992

Since FMW has proved false most previous predictions, it is difficult to chart their course for the coming year. They seem to have thrown out the old rule book and are rewriting a new one as they go along. They need a heel to feud with Onita now that Pogo is ancient history. They could turn Tarzan Goto for the umpteenth time but sooner or later that's going to fall flat. Onita was happy enough with Ed Farhat's work in the November-December tag tournament to bring him back for more, but the Sheik is hardly in shape to do 14 minute exploding mine matches in place of Pogo and Goto. Cactus Jack would have been the perfect FMW heel to play opposite Onita, but his arrival in WCW nixes that possibility. If WINGS folds, Eddie Gilbert may be a good choice based on his Philadelphia brawls with Cactus.

This group does not have TV and



EDDIE GILBERT

probably does not want or need it. Over-exposure is the one thing that could kill their popularity. Look for the first four to six months to follow their 1991 pace, but if Onita is going to increase his popularity and realistically challenge the two bigger promotions, positive changes are necessary.

A leopard cannot change his spots, so do not look for FMW to go on a spending spree stealing anyone's top stars. Onita will try to muddle through hoping that WINGS is grounded and Pogo returns to the fold. He will fill out the time with various imported martial arts specialists and his own unique version of the French Grand Guignol.

RINGS OF JAPAN

Akira Maeda has played the role of James Dean in Japanese wrestling for most of his career. He has been the rebel striking out against the older establishment. He twice bolted from Inoki's New Japan to form the Universal Wrestling Federation (UWF). His second UWF run was an overwhelming success and should have made Maeda a financially secure - if not rich - man. However, internal problems destroyed the UWF late in 1990 and their

core pool of talent deserted Maeda, spreading out in several directions.

Maeda found himself at age 31 no longer the young rebel, but instead struggling to stay in the business. For most of 1989 and 1990 he was in wrestling's penthouse. In early 1991, he couldn't even get a room at the inn. Without enough other talent for even a scaled down strong style promotion, Maeda attempted to build a slim group around around the talents and appeal of only one star - himself. With the help from Chris Dolman of Holland and financial backing from Japanese satellite television, he formed RINGS. Maeda claims that the action in RINGS is athletically authentic, or in wrestling carney, "a shoot." This is clearly not so. Some of the bouts on some cards may involve some shooting, but Maeda's bouts are still worked in the tradition of pro wrestling.

Maeda put on only four shows in 1991 selling some 32,000 tickets at fairly high prices. No other promotion in Japan can claim an average of 8,000 at each show. On the other hand, nearly every promotion in Japan sold a lot more than 32,000 seats during the year. The talent of RINGS is primarily imported from Holland with

additional workers from Russia, France, and America. On their four cards, there have been 20 bouts involving 40 possible wrestlers. Twelve have been Japanese and 28 have been imports. Outside of the Mexican-based Universal promotion, this is the highest percentage use of non-Japanese talent in the country.

Because of his bare-bones promotional structure, Maeda's RINGS is probably a financial success. However, the bouts have failed to generate much fan enthusiasm and Maeda himself shows only momentary glimpses of his once tremendous ability. He is no longer the darling of the media he once was and his home video cassettes are no longer a hot item.

Outlook for 1992

RINGS should continue at their present pace for at least the next six months. They will have one show about every six weeks trying to maintain the fiction that the bouts take a heavy toll on the athletes requiring several weeks to recuperate. If they can keep drawing in the 8,000 range and money from the satellite company keeps flowing in, Maeda should be able to comfortably survive.

How long the Japanese fans will support a promotion which is basically a Dutch outfit? Sooner or later, Maeda is going to have to entice some native talent to join him. There is already speculation of Maeda going against top karate star Masaaki Satake later in 1992.

Much depends on the fate of former allies Takada, Yamazaki, Fujiwara, Funaki, and Suzuki. If Maeda can get any of them back, he could parlay it into several big shows. Failure to do that could spell difficulty for Maeda in the latter part of the year.

SUPER WORLD SPORTS (SWS)

By its very nature, the business of professional wrestling involves conflict, battling, and fighting. It is intended that these elements are seen in the ring. For much of 1991, SWS waged battles that were nowhere near the ring and took the emphasis off what fans were suppose to be looking at.

They battled the Japanese wrestling media, banning several publications from their shows for unfavorable coverage. They

CONTACTING THE JAPANESE PROMOTIONS

Many Americans are apprehensive about going to Japan to see wrestling since many of their cards are sold out and tickets are hard to obtain. The best way to avoid any problems is to contact the various promotions well in advance of your trip to purchase tickets which will be waiting for you when you arrive. Here are the addresses of the major promotions and the persons to contact. It is best to have your letter translated into Japanese before you send it. This can be done by a number of businesses which cater to US firms doing business in Japan. If this is not possible, send it in English and hope they have someone who can read it.

New Japan Professional Wrestling
6 - 4 - 10
Roppongi, Minato-ku
Tokyo 106
Japan
attn: Mr. Kurakaka
phone: 011-81-3-3405-3111

All Japan Professional Wrestling
7 - 3 - 12
Roppongi, Minato-ku
Tokyo 106
Japan
attn: Mr. Iiyama or Mr. Ohba

Super World Sports - SWS
ABE Building
7th Floor, 1 - 10 - 11
Higashiazabu - Minato-ku
Tokyo 106
Japan
attn: Mr. Kuramori (can read English)
phone: 011-81-3-3583-9341 ask for Mr. Kuramori

All Japan Women Professional Wrestling
2 - 17 - 17
Shimomeguro, Meguro-ku
Tokyo 153
Japan
attn: Mr. Ogawa

Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling - FMW
Gotanda Nagatani - Town Plaza
504
2 - 2 - 31 - 11
Nishi Gotanda
Shinagawa-ku
Tokyo 141
Japan

Include the dates of your trip and be flexible allowing for several possible arena dates and ticket prices - which can be expensive by US standards.

battled the hardcore fans, many of whom bought tickets just to harass the top stars. They even had to battle their own talent when one of their own stars grabbed a live microphone and called them all "fakes."

With all of this negative energy being expended, it is no wonder that fan attention was rarely focused on the group's wrestling. Moneybags owner Hachiro Tanaka made a positive move in June by placing Genichiro Tenryu at the head of wrestling operations. The quality of some bouts did improve as more attention was given to younger talents such as Sano, Ishinriki, Orihara, Kitahara, and Hatanaka. Hachiro Tanaka financed a strong style promotion and used Yoshiaki Fujiwara and Masa Funaki on a few major cards. Late in the year, SWS acquired one of the best young wrestlers in the world, Yoshihiro Asai. Already a star with the touring Lucha promotion, Universal, Asai should be a definite plus for the the group and help attract a broader fan base. The prospect of bouts pitting Asai against the better SWS wrestlers is very promising.

The negatives far outweighed the positives for the year. They had two Tokyo Dome shows but failed to sell even 40% of available tickets. It would have been far better for the group's flagging prestige to have moved the shows to the 17,000 seat Yokohama Ice Arena and bragged about two sellouts in a packed arena. They are saddled with an alliance with Titan Sports and their circus reputation. What makes the relationship doubly-bad is Titan's insistence on calling the shots and sending over wrestlers who cannot work in the Japanese style.

Outlook for 1991

Any Japanese promotion that has the financial backing of Megame Optical and the services of Genichiro Tenryu should be able to stay in business. If SWS wants to be in the hunt a year from now, they will have to continue to make changes.

They need to patch up their problems with the wrestling media, especially Pro Wrestling Weekly - Baseball Magazine Sha. Getting their show off the WOWWOW pay channel and onto a network would help greatly. They should abandon the cavernous arenas where they are forced to paper houses when selling less than half the seats in favor of smaller, more intimate arenas.

As for their in-the-ring product, they

TOP TEN LOCATIONS FOR JAPANESE WRESTLING

1. Tokyo Korakuen Hall
2. Budokan Hall In Tokyo
3. Ryogoko Sumo Hall In Tokyo
4. Osaka Prefectural Gym
5. Urayasu Tokyo Bay N.K. Hall
6. Hakata Star Lane
7. Sapporo Nakajima Sports Centre
8. Yokohama Arena
9. Tokyo Egg Dome
10. Kawasaki EAST Outdoor Hall

need to phase out or phase down the aging veterans like Yatsu, Hara, Ishikawa, Kabuki, and Tsurumi in favor of the younger and more talented workers. To stimulate interest in individual matches they should add the traditional singles and tag titles that every other promotion has.

Finally, they need to change or modify their relationship with Titan Sports. Either Titan must agree to send only its better workers who can work properly in Japan or Tanaka should cancel the relationship purging the group of its cartoon connection. Tanaka and Tenryu could play that up, appealing to nationalistic pride and the athletic integrity of the sport.

How much of this prescription for success will be followed is anybody's guess. It is clear SWS cannot go on forever at their money-losing pace. It is very possible that Hachiro Tanaka could simply tire of all of the headaches and criticism and walk away. The longer SWS continues to be a wasteful investment, the chances of its demise only increase.

UNIVERSAL

Newsweek has a sidebar feature called "Conventional Wisdom Watch." It measures the current popularity of persons, ideas, or fads using an arrow pointing up, sideways, or down to indicate in which direction the item being measured is headed. If *Newsweek* analyzed wrestling, the Lucha Libre promotion, Universal, would most certainly merit a downward arrow.

When Universal first began its quarterly tours in 1990, it became a hot promotion to watch. The high flying

Mexican style with doses of comedy found a receptive audience in Japan. American tape traders clamored for their tapes and spot shows filmed by fans with hand held cameras became sought after collectors' items.

The focus of all this attention was not the Mexican luchadors, but a young Japanese flyer named Yoshihiro Asai. At only 5'8" and about 180 pounds, Asai wasn't big enough to trade power moves with anyone, so he made up for it with a combination of skill and grace that made him one of the smoothest workers in the business. He was the first to use many of the aerial maneuvers which have since been copied by others. The best was a moonsault flip off the middle of the second rope, ending up splashing his opponent on the arena floor. Asai also had a bit of the Maeda rebel image since he failed to make the grade at a New Japan tryout camp and had to go to Mexico to make a living at his chosen craft. His triumphant return to Japan was an "in your face, slam dunk" to the conventional wrestling establishment. But in October, Asai jumped from the Mexican UWA promotion to EMLL of Mexico and in turn from Universal to SWS. Universal lost its big native star and was forced to put Japanese youngsters Bulldog KT, Cooly SZ, Monkey Magic Wakita, and Masa Michinoku into positions of prominence hoping one of them would catch on like Asai did.

Asai did appear on one final card, the Nov. 7 Tokyo Korakuen Hall show, but for the rest of the tour the promotion was scrambling to reorganize.

The impact of Asai can clearly be seen in a comparison of the group's March and November tours. In March, they were in Japan for eight days, Mar. 7-14. They had seven arena cards and sold a total of 13,400 tickets. Five of the shows were at Korakuen Hall. Asai was on all these cards. In November, they toured Japan for eight days, Nov. 7-14, and could only book five arena shows, three of them at Korakuen Hall. They sold 7,750 tickets. Asai only appeared on the opening show which was also the biggest show of the tour.

With Asai, they averaged 1,910 paid admissions. Without Asai they averaged only 1,475 and had trouble booking enough dates to fill the tour. Even allowing for a low \$30 average ticket price, the departure of Yoshihiro Asai cost Universal a

TOP TEN JAPANESE WOMEN

1. Akira Hokuta
2. Kyoko Inoue
3. Bull Nakano
4. Minami Toyota
5. Esteher Moreno
6. Bison Kimura
7. Toshiyo Yamada (all the above from All Japan Women)
8. Reiko Hoshino JWP
9. Harley Salto JWP
10. Dynamite Kansai (formerly Miss A)JWP

conservative estimate of \$150,000 in November alone. With four tours a year, that could well mean a loss of income of \$600,000 in 1992.

Outlook In 1992

Universal has a January tour scheduled so as those attendance figures come in, it will be possible to judge if fans have adjusted to an Asai-less promotion. There is a great deal of pressure on the Japanese youngsters who just two years ago were FMW prelim boys. They are trying to pack the roster with many Mexican big names to boost attendance knowing that the January tour could make or break them.

Their long range prospects look less than bright. The competition for the fans' yen and loyalty is keen and the loss of Asai could doom them to the promotional graveyard. I would be greatly surprised if they are still operating on the same level with four yearly tours one year from now. Do not be shocked if Universal closes down entirely sometime later this year and devotes their time to wrestling solely in Mexico.

UNION OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING FORCE INTERNATIONAL (UWFI)

Besides Maeda's RINGS, there are two other strong style promotions in Japan. One of which is the UWFI with stars Nobuhiko Takada, Kazuo Yamazaki, and a fine

supporting cast with Yoji Anjo, Kiyoshi Tamura, and Tatsuo Nakano. American Bob Backlund made several UWFI tours as the big name opponent of Takada.

They formed in the Spring of 1991 and use seven former UWF wrestlers. Their name is a purposeful contrivance to give them the UWF initials. Although they are rich in talent, there is very little money behind the group and no TV. They use the old UWF theme music and duplicate their famous entrance ceremony in an attempt to get over as the real UWF promotion.

From May to November they put on eight cards drawing a total of 26,850 fans for an average of 3,920 per show. Four of the cards were held at Korakuen Hall and ringside tickets were priced higher than any other group. Their early shows garnered mixed reviews and many imported workers had trouble adapting to the strong style. The group's prestige hit bottom on September 26 in Sapporo when Takada beat Backlund in just 75 seconds and the fans nearly rioted.

As the year closed, UWFI seems to have bounced back with a mixed match at Sumo Hall pitting Takada against boxer Trevor Berbick. Ringside seats are priced at \$154 and they expect to sell out the 11,500 seat hall. It will be the single most successful strong style show of the year and the largest gate as well.



YOSHIHIRO ASAI

Outlook for 1992

UWFI should be able to prosper in 1992 with a local spot show every three to four weeks combined with two cards on the level of the Dec. 22 Sumo Hall show. This would generate enough income to pay their regular talent and continue funding the occasional "big name" opponent.

PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING FUJIWARA-GUMI

Megame Optical owner Hachiro Tanaka was so inspired by the big UWF U-Cosmos show at the sold out Tokyo Egg Dome, that he started his own wrestling promotion. However, Tanaka began to lose interest when his new SWS floundered and bore no resemblance to the old UWF. When the UWF disbanded late in 1990, Tanaka signed several of their stars and started a second promotion built around the strong style made popular by the old UWF.

PWF-GUMI is centered around a solid veteran, Yoshiaki Fujiwara, and two popular youngsters, Masa Funaki and Minoru Suzuki. Funaki has all of the tools to be a mega-star along the lines of Maeda, Inoki, and Tenryu. They pad a slim talent roster with imported workers including Wayne Shamrock, Bart Vale, and Jumbo Barretta.

They had their first show on March 4 at Tokyo Korakuen Hall selling out all 2,306 tickets in just one hour. The show was no runaway artistic success and tickets for subsequent shows have sold at a far more typical speed. Outside of Korakuen, most of their shows fall a few hundred seats short of legitimate sellouts. This group has the support of Karl Gotch, a legend in Japan. Gotch silently divorced himself from the old UWF since he disapproved of the heavy use of karate kicks that Maeda and company were famous for. Gotch favors lots of mat work combined with arm and leg submission holds. It produces bouts which look extremely real but many find extremely boring. Gotch's support has helped the group's prestige, but it has hurt the quality of bouts producing dull cards that usually have only one decent match out of four or five on a card.

PWF put on seven shows in eight months selling just over 22,000 tickets. They averaged 3,184 per show. Tanaka also used Fujiwara, Funaki, and Suzuki on

some of the bigger SWS cards and sent SWS star Naoki Sano to work in his strong style promotion.

Outlook for 1992

Of the three strong style promotions, this one seems to be the weakest. Their talent pool is better than RINGS, but they have no big drawing power the stature of Akira Maeda. They are not as deep as the UWFI and use more imported talent to fill out their cards. Their strong point - the financial backing of Megame Optical - may also be their Achilles heel since Tanaka could decide to wash his hands of the whole mess since all he has seen so far is red ink.

PWF-GUMI will stay in business just as long as their patron saint keeps writing the checks. When that stops, look for Fujiwara, Funaki, and Suzuki to gravitate to one of the other strong style promotions. The other possibility would be for Tanaka to merge both groups together. If that happens, it will become difficult for the UWF style workers to hold onto their image as something different. Many former UWF fans already complain about PWF stars appearing on SWS cards along with WWF entertainers. Any merging of the groups would only aggravate those problems.

JAPAN WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING (JWP)

It is difficult enough running a women's wrestling promotion in a male dominated sport. But it must be only more so when you are considered a poor second to the "real women's promotion," All-Japan Women's Wrestling. JWP just does not compare to All Japan Women, despite the best of efforts. Then again, not many of the men's promotions do either.

JWP has some very good workers that compare favorably with the middle tier of

All Japan Women. Reiko Hoshino, formerly The Scorpion, is by far their most talented worker. Harley Saito and Dynamite Kansai usually produce a solid match. They import foreign talent, usually going for the bigger girls since most of theirs are in the 5 foot range. Their latest acquisition is Reggie Bennett, who recently worked for Onita in FMW. Bennett's claim to fame is her upper body development.



DUMP MATSUMOTO

Bennett does for chests what Lex Luger does for abdominals. They also use some of the All Japan Women who go past the mandatory retirement age or violate All-Japan's no-men standard of behavior.

JWP is loosely affiliated with the New Japan men's promotion which in turn is affiliated with the US based WCW promotion. That explains why four JWP women were presented on WCW's Phoenix PPV card last year. They run full-time doing series that last about three to five weeks and then take two weeks off. They usually appear in the smaller arenas and sell between 1,000 and 2,200 tickets. They had several sellouts at Korakuen last year.

Outlook for 1992

For the past few months there have been rumors of financial instability at JWP. They have tried to compensate for no TV with releases of their better cards on home video tape and have met with some success. They will try to hold on for a while longer hoping that some of the attention and money that has been showered on All Japan Women will come their way. If the boom in Japanese women's wrestling continues, they just may benefit. However, their long term survival is at best a 50-50 proposition without TV.

WINGS

One way to tell that you are a success is by the number of imitators you have. As

Onita's FMW played to bigger and bigger crowds and garnered more media attention, several key FMW players decided to strike out on their own in an attempt to make their fortune. On June 16, Victor Quinones of Puerto Rico announced the formation of Capitol Sports Promotion Japan. His partners were Kazuyoshi Osaka, a former FMW president; Kiyoshi Ibaragi, a former booker of FMW foreign talent; and Mr. Pogo, the current lead heel for FMW. On June 21, Ibaragi announced the promotion's new name - WINGS.

They opened Aug. 7 at Korakuen Hall and had seven shows over the next ten days. They averaged around 1,400 fans per show. They came back in September for six more shows and maintained their average of 1,400 fans per show. In addition to Pogo they relied a great deal on imported talent including TNT, The Headhunters, The Great Wojo, Danny Davis, and Eddie Gilbert.

Most of their bouts were lackluster. The entire card not very good by Japanese standards. Pogo was able to pull off a few good bouts with heavy brawling in the style of Onita, but the word among the fans was fairly negative on WING.

Just when the promotion was barely off the ground, WING divided into two - well wings. On November 19, Ibaragi was fired and announced a new promotion, World Martial Arts (WMA). They booked time at a TV studio and are set to tape on Dec. 23 using local and Korean talent. Pogo and Quinones kept the WINGS name and most of the foreign talent and debuted on Dec. 10 at Korakuen before a disappointing crowd of 1,535. When you cannot sell out at Korakuen, you know something is very wrong.

Outlook for 1992

Right from its inception, WINGS seemed to strain the limits of a promotion's credibility. The idea of a promotion built around the talents of Mr. Pogo seems a bit far-fetched. Dividing their talent into two different groups seems suicidal. But remember, these are all people who have already jumped ship once previously. A second jump should not have surprised anyone. Of all the promotions in Japan WINGS and its separated twin, WMA, have the least chance to be around one year from now. Look for WINGS to be grounded in 1992.

1991 PRO WRESTLING DEATHS

-----By Eric Krol-----

Nineteen-ninety-one had its share of deaths in professional wrestling. A family with a history of tragic deaths lost another member last summer. At the end of the year, a long-standing promotion died. So, let's rewind and review the names in wrestling who did the ultimate job in 1991:

Ed "The Bull" Gantner: The new year hadn't even begun when this former Florida star took his own life on Dec. 31. Gantner had been severely depressed after his body rejected a transplanted kidney. It is believed Gantner's kidney and overall health problems were due to steroid use. When the NWA bought the Florida promotion in 1987, Gantner was going to be called to Atlanta for a major heel push by booker Dusty Rhodes, but the kidney problems had started and effectively ended his wrestling career.

Duke Keomuka: The father of Pat Tanaka passed away after heart surgery in Las Vegas during the first week of July. Keomuka was a big star during the 1960s, playing a Japanese heel role with Mr. Moto as his tag team partner. Keomuka was actually Hawaiian, but of course that mattered little in the post-World War II era. It's funny how little things change.

Charles Iwamoto: Known as "Mr. Moto" during his in-ring days, he died of a heart attack on July 6 at age 71. According to the 7/29 *Wrestling Observer*, Mr. Moto was the fist cousin of Duke Keomuka. Iwamoto worked the front office for the LaBelle promotion in Los Angeles during the 1970s. He held the WWA tag team titles with Kim III during 1963, winning the titles from Red Bastien & Bearcat Wright.

Chief Thunder Mountain: This northeastern independent wrestler whose real name was David Moser, died of an apparent massive heart attack in late August at age 31. Moser, a 420-pounder, was trained by Larry Sharpe at the Monster Factory in the mid-80s and often teamed with Big Hoss, another behemoth, as a babyface team for Sharpe and promoter Dennis Coraluzzo.

Gene Anderson: This great heel of the



DICK THE BRUISER

60s and 70s passed away from a heart attack on Oct. 31. Although reports of his actual age vary, it is believed he was 58. He teamed with Larry Heinimi and Al Rogowski as the Anderson Brothers tag team, winning the NWA tag belts five times. The only "real" Anderson of the bunch is survived by his son, Brad, who wrestled on indie cards and also as jobber Zan Panzer.

Steve Schumann: Known as Lance

Idol, among other names, Schumann passed away on Sept. 26 of a heart attack at age 32. Schumann, according to a *Wrestling Observer* story, was a drug addict who wound up overloading his pacemaker and causing his own death. He idolized Ray Stevens while growing up in California and often imitated his interview style in his well-traveled 13-year career. Perhaps the most famous incident involving Schumann was his faked heart attack in the locker room after a failed indie show he had promoted in California. With names such as the Rock n' Roll Express and Sgt. Slaughter looking for their payoffs, he took the dive and disappeared for a while, resurfacing during 1990 in Puerto Rico. Schumann had a history of heart problems and apparently vowed to change his lifestyle after a heart attack following a match last Memorial Day weekend. He obviously failed.

El Gran Davies: This famous Mexican heel referee died Nov. 3 at age 51 after refereeing a main event between Konnan and Cien Caras. "He was one of the most elemental characters in all of Lucha Libre," said Mexican wrestling expert Steve Sims. Davies figured in the finishes of most of the important matches and the use was always subtle but vital. The official cause of death was listed as a brain aneurysm. However, Sims said there are still rumors about Davies' death. The finish of the match was two disqualifications on Konnan for hitting the referee, Davies, who was being a heel and causing Konnan problems. "There's a debate on whether one of the blows to the head caused the death," Sims said. "But, since no autopsy was performed, we'll never know."

Dick the Bruiser: Real name Richard Afflis, Dick the Bruiser was one in a parade of legendary deaths. Afflis died in early November at age 62 while lifting weights in his Florida home. He apparently ruptured a blood vessel and died of internal bleeding. Dick was one of the biggest stars in his day, teaming with the Crusher and dominating the AWA tag team scene in the 60s and 70s. He also ran the Indianapolis territory for a long time and always put himself over. Bruiser had an unforgettable gruff, gravelly-voiced interview style. Bruiser believed he was the ultimate tough guy until the end, refusing to sell at Starrcade '90 when he and Sting were under attack by all of the fake Black Scorpions in a cage after

the main event. Bruiser was quoted in the book, Whatever Happened to Gorgeous George as saying, "People give me a laugh. They form fan clubs for me and I cut 'em cold. They put up signs cheering me on and I rip 'em down. They come to me for autographs and I steal their pens. They send me money for pictures and I keep it. The slobs don't know any better, they still go away happy." The author wrote: "On a TV show around 1961, the announcer told his audience that the big, luscious birthday cake was at ringside for Cowboy Bob Ellis. It seems that some orphans had scraped up their last pennies, emptied their piggy banks, and bought the cake for their hero. The Bruiser came out, stomped on the cake, and presumably made the orphans cry." Some who knew Dick the Bruiser believe that is how he would like to be remembered.

Wilbur Snyder: Dick the Bruiser's partner died shortly after the Bruiser. The apparent cause of death was heart failure from lymphatic cancer. The *Wrestling Observer's* Dave Meltzer said Wilbur was a typical All-American babyface wrestler in the 50s and 60s. Snyder was over huge with his world's greatest scientific wrestler moniker. "When we look back at the records, he sold out St. Louis more times than Hogan or Flair did," Meltzer said. "Snyder was a big football player, but a good athlete who was agile for a big man," Meltzer added.

Mitsu "Rocky" Hata: Hata died of diabetes-related health problems on Nov. 14. He was a mid-level wrestler in All Japan who also wrestled in Florida in the early 70s. The first Rocky movie came out in 1976 and that's when he debuted the gimmick. Sims compared him to that of a Kenta Kobashi by today's standards.

Roy "Ripper" Collins: Collins died at age 57 in November from AIDS-related effects. Collins was a heel in the Southern territories in the 60s and teamed with Luke Graham. However, he reached his biggest success as the lead heel in Honolulu for years. He also headlined in Portland. Collins was also a great heel color commentator in Los Angeles in 1972-73. Although he was one of the first heel commentators, Meltzer said, "He was better than almost any of them today, except maybe Bobby Heenan and Jesse (Ventura)." Collins, according to Meltzer, became a leading gay rights activist in Honolulu after he retired from wrestling.

Vivian (Diane) Vachon: The famous lady wrestler of the 70s was killed in an automobile accident by a drunk driver last year. The Vachon wrestling family has had its share of bad luck with drunk drivers, as Mad Dog Vachon lost one of his legs after being hit by one a few years ago. Vachon married and later divorced wrestler Buddy Wolfe.

Chris Von Erich: The youngest son of the famous wrestling family committed suicide Sept. 12 at age 21 outside his home



WRESTLING'S GREATEST NIGHTMARE

CHRIS VON ERICH SURROUNDED BY HIS FAMILY

(Illustration by John Hitchcock)

in Tyler, Tex. Chris had become depressed over health problems which had hindered his wish to become a wrestling star. A small bodyframe, only 5'5" and 165 lbs, and chronic asthma kept him from really having a chance to compete in the ring, although he did wrestle a few gimmick matches before his death. He suffered an arm injury on an indie card and combined with the growing asthma problem, took his own life. He left a short note telling his family it was not their fault. Chris became the fourth Adkisson son to die at an early age. David Adkisson died of a drug overdose in 1984 while on tour of Japan at age 24. Jack Adkisson died in a freak electrocution accident at age 6. Mike Adkisson also committed suicide in 1987, depressed over health problems which did not allow him to wrestle for any length of time. He encountered toxic shock syndrome in 1985 and was never the same again.

Nick Gulas: Famous as being one of the most successful and stingiest promoters of the 60s and 70s. Gulas was noted for giving payouts as little as \$5 or \$10 for sold-

out shows according to Meltzer. At his peak, Gulas ran successful shows that sold out 5000 seat venues in territories like Memphis, Alabama, and eastern Tennessee. Gulas was over-taken by Jerry Jarrett around 1978. "Nick... was a real rags to riches story," said Jerry Lawler in the *Pro Wrestling Torch Annual IV*. "When he started promoting in Nashville, he literally walked all over town, putting up posters and stuff and literally would stop and cut shoe soles out of his posters and stick it in his shoes because there were holes in his shoes. But he finally had gotten to where he made a fortune from the wrestling business in this area. Nick was a good promoter in that he really knew how to utilize or get something out of nothing. He learned that by having to do that." Lawler blamed the fall of Gulas as a promoter on Gulas's son, George, who "Nick would not say 'no' to," according to Lawler. "(He) killed Nick's business and alienated everyone around him. Next thing you know, Nick was in a nursing home and George came and took his false teeth and sold them." Gulas died in a state-run nursing home.

Bialo the Giant: Not much information was available on this grappler, but it is known that he was from Brooklyn and weighed around 450 pounds as a wrestler. Bialo died in his mid-20s.

Frankie Williams: Williams, a jobber in his late-30s, was most famous for his involvement in a skit on Piper's Pit where Roddy insulted and attacked Williams. No information could be found on Williams's death.

When looking back at this year's deaths, it also seems that heart attacks are a general trend of pro wrestling deaths. Meltzer said he linked the use of steroids with the heart ailments. For example, he said Dick the Bruiser was a heavy user of steroids in the 60s, back when steroids were primitive. However, it is unknown what the future will bring in light of the numerous blatant cases of steroid abuse during the post-McMahon explosion era of wrestling. The test cases are occurring now, and the results of years of chemical abuse on bodies such as Jim "Ultimate Warrior" Hellwig's are yet unknown.

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THE OFFICIAL PRO WRESTLING TORCH

1991 QUIZ

ARE YOU SMART ENOUGH TO PASS?

By Bruce Mitchell

Illustrated by John Hitchcock

"Hardcore", "Serious", and "Underground" are all terms bantered around in the newsletters to describe a certain type of pro wrestling fan. These terms are merely namby-pamby substitutes for the one that some fans do not have the guts to use: Smart. Are you really Smart? Do you have what it takes to separate yourself from the "others" - the ones at the matches who cannot recite the history of the U.S. tag belts and name the dates of the title changes? Can you recite the arrest records of all the wrestlers in the WWF? Do you go to every single independent card within a thousand mile radius of your unfurnished basement apartment? Do you treasure your direct-eye-contact with Eric Embry ("He looked at me!") that night outside the Sportatorium as the crowning achievement of your entire existence? Did you quit your job at the prison because it conflicted with your viewing of the IWCCW syndicated show? Do you spend time wondering what Salvatore Bellomo or the Motor City Madman are up to now?

Maybe, just maybe, you have what it takes to be a real Smart fan instead of just a lowly person who simply enjoys watching professional wrestling. Once you are certified as a real Smart fan, an entire new world of enchantment will open up to you. This new world can include, but is not limited to:

*The glamour of having ringside security hassle you for no good reason.

*The thrill of waiting in line to get an autograph from Moondog Rex.

*That wired feeling you have the next day when a fellow Smart fan calls at three in the morning with the deathless news that Eric Bischoff has auditioned for a game show.

*Listening to long earnest speeches from your friends about the best way to turn around the fortunes of WCW when they used to just talk about boring stuff like music and sports or their families.

*Sneaking in plastic soda bottles to the bar so you will not actually have to buy a drink while you wait to get a glimpse of Gary Capetta.

*Feeling superior to that fat woman in the dirty dress across the aisle at the house show because you have a subscription to the *Torch*.

*Paying hundreds of dollars to travel to a pay-per-view that no one in their right mind would watch on television for free.

Do you have what it takes to be a real Smart fan? There is only one authentic, certified way to find out and that is by taking the 1991 *Pro Wrestling Torch Yearbook "Smart Fan Quiz."* It makes no difference if you knew who the Black Scorpion was before Ole Anderson did, since that is yesterday's trivia. To receive all the rewards and prestige of being Smart, you must be able to pass this quiz. Then you will be certified for the next calendar year. How much do you really know about the past year in professional wrestling?

Now is the time to put your money where your endlessly yammering mouth is, buddy.

Instructions: Select the one best answer to each of these multiple choice questions. If you must have help, feel free to call the WCW Corporate Headquarters at 1-800-LOST-MILLIONS, a line founded by Jim Herd. Good luck! Let's face it, you'll need it...

1. Pick the one wrestler on this list who actually participated in the prestigious Global Wrestling Federation Light Heavyweight Championship Tournament?

- a) Chris Benoit
- b) Negro Casas
- c) Rick Steamboat
- d) Eddie Gilbert
- e) Keiji Yamada
- f) Ricky Morton
- g) Yoshiro Asai
- h) "Beer Gut" John Tatum

2. Titan Sports owner Vincent K. McMahon announced in July that the WWF was now the best in "drug-free family entertainment". What is the single best reason for believing him?

- a) He said it right there on television.
- b) The continued presence of The Warlord.
- c) Arsenio believes it.
- d) The Macho Man started wearing a t-shirt in the ring.
- e) Your own personal use of mind-altering drugs.

3. Universal Wrestling Federation mogul Herb "I Threatened To Sue Everyone At Least Once This Year Including a 15 Year Old Kid" Abrams celebrated the enormous success of his first pay-per-view "Beach Brawl" show by:

- a) treating his entire crew of wrestlers to a sumptuous dinner at the best restaurant in town.
- b) sending a case of champagne to all the television stations that carry the UWF syndicated package.
- c) personally writing a thank you note to everyone who ordered the show on their

cable system.

d) quickly hopping in his rented limousine and stiffing the local arena and media for the costs of running the show.



4. Hardcore booking candidate favorite Bill "Walking Tall For America" Watts cited Lester Maddox in his "Torch Talk" interview in the 1991 Summer Annual as being correct in his civil rights stand in the 60s. For what is former Georgia Lieutenant Governor Lester Maddox best remembered?

- a) Saving the lives of twenty American soldiers during the Vietnam War.
- b) Calming the fears of the Georgia people after the Kennedy assassination.
- c) Eliminating the sales tax on food in Georgia so that his poorer citizens would have more money to spend on necessities.
- d) Passing out wooden ax handles to the all-white patrons and workers at his restaurant so that they could beat up any black person with the temerity to request service.

5. Wrestlers are capable of all sorts of conduct, some of which are listed here. Which is the only one that got a major star fired?

- a) Getting served with several felony charges of possession with intent to distribute classified drugs.
- b) Passing out on an airplane leading to the discovery of forty grams of marijuana in their bed.

c) Repeated lying on national television about your habitual, chronic steroid abuse in spite of knowing of the growing evidence to the contrary waiting in the wings and leaving yourself and the company you work for exposed to a national scandal.

d) Posing in bikini briefs oiled down and "pumped up" in front of the office boss. Whoops, I forgot. Can't fire the owner.

e) Pushing your ugly fish-faced son beyond the bounds of reason despite having several more marketable wrestlers in the company.

f) Demonstrating the in-ring workrate of a lamp post.

g) Asking for his contract to be honored instead of cut in half salary-wise.

6. Scott Steiner and Sid Justice both blew out one of their biceps requiring them to undergo major rehabilitative surgery and stay out of the ring for several months. What was the cause of these wrestlers' injuries?

- a) Bad luck.
- b) Steroid abuse.
- c) Don't know, not enough choices.

7. Pick the wrestler with the highest ratio of talent to degrading, embarrassing gimmick from the following list:

- a) Brad Armstrong as the only wrestler in history ever to take the name of an asphalt road - "Badstreet".
- b) Brad Armstrong as the Disney children's Mickey Mouse film - "Fantasia".
- c) Brad Armstrong shooting silly string as the ridiculous rip off of the comic book character Spiderman - "Arachniman".
- d) Matt Borne as the Hee Haw Hillbilly - "Big Josh".
- e) Keiji Yamada in the garish red and white shiny space suit with horns - "Jushin 'Thunder' Liger".
- f) Dustin Rhodes as the son of the fat, no-talent, egomaniac Dusty Rhodes - "Dustin Rhodes".
- g) Brian Pillman as the inaccurately named human banana - "The Yellow Dog".
- h) Rick Steamboat in a big rubber lizard suit and belching fire - "The Dragon".

8. Diamond Dallas Page is the



Renaissance Man of WCW for the year 1991 because of:

- a) his total failure as a wrestling manager in 1991.
- b) his total failure as a color commentator in 1991.
- c) his total failure as a wrestler in 1991.
- d) all of the above.

9. The legendary Bruno Sammartino, hero to millions, provided a much needed service to professional wrestling by:

- a) decrying the rampant use of illegal steroids in wrestling.
- b) calling for a return to the regional system of promoting.
- c) ridiculing the unbelievable cartoon characters that are turning off the loyal wrestling audience.
- d) threatening to throttle Torch columnist Mark "You May Not Like It... Uh, I Forgot the Rest" Madden.



10. After endless months of television, "The Boss" of "The Cartel" in the Global Wrestling Federation was revealed to actually be:

- a) the concession stand manager.
- b) the guy who puts up the ring and exposes that he doesn't wear underwear every time he bends over.
- c) the old lady who sweeps up after the show.
- d) the television syndicator.
- e) Bonnie Blackstone.
- f) well, not Scandar Akbar, at least.

11. Steve "Dr. Death" Williams was so excited to win the UWF TV Title that he immediately:

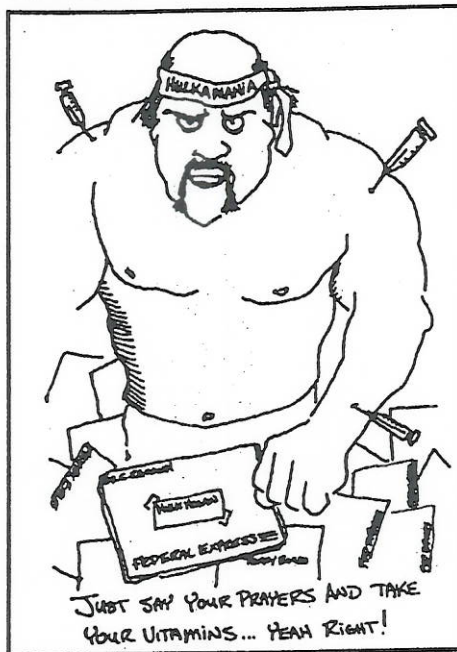
- a) challenged all the other World Champions by name in an appearance on the Regis and Kathy Lee show.
- b) promised to defend the title in every major UWF city.
- c) went into intensive training to be prepared for his long list of worthy contenders.
- d) never defended the title and went back to Japan.

12. Special Media Category #1 - According to Howard Cosell's latest book, the pro wrestling column in *The National Sports Daily* penned under the name "Dave Meltzer" was actually written by:

- a) Bill Apter
- b) Frank DeFord
- c) Dennis Brent
- d) Mike Lano

13. Titan Sports claims to present the best in "family sports entertainment". The PTA would recommend which wholesome activity as best for children's viewing which the WWF engaged in during the past year?

- a) The Bushwackers chanting "faggot, faggot" at the Beverly Brothers every night for two months.
- b) the WWF exploiting wartime fears of children by putting traitor Sgt. Slaughter, self-proclaimed friend of Saddam Hussein, in the Wrestlemania main event.
- c) Randy Savage being bitten by a live cobra on free television.



- d) Jake Roberts physically attacking Elizabeth.
- e) Skinner loudly yelling "Get up, Nigger" at Virgil during house show matches.
- f) The Undertaker attempting to murder the Ultimate Warrior by locking him in a real casket with no air.
- g) Hulk Hogan comparing himself to Jesus Christ during Survivor Series hype.
- h) Kerry Von Erich giving a "Just Say No" speech to Cub Scouts.

14. WCW management came down hard on television announcer Paul E. Dangerously when he allegedly tattled to Eddie Gilbert about a planned angle with Lex Luger going title vs. title with Memphis Champion Jerry Lawler. What was the harshest punishment management could devise for Paul E.?

- a) Suspending him with pay.
- b) Removing him from color commentating duties.
- c) Prematurely ending his trans-gender feud with Missy Hyatt.
- d) Giving him a spot as the leading heel manager of wrestling's largest stable.

15. The Global Wrestling Federation claimed to be the only truly worldwide promotion in existence. In which one of these international metropolises did the GWF actually promote a show?

- a) Rio De Janero, Brazil
- b) New York City, U.S.A.
- c) Tokyo, Japan
- d) Auckland, New Zealand
- e) Barcelona, Spain
- f) Marietta, Georgia

16. What was the personal highlight of my trip to Florida for the WCW pay-per-view show, "SuperBrawl"?

- a) Being called a "jerk" and told that "Your opinion sucks!" in front of about thirty people in the bar, including mini T.V. star Jason Hervey, by WCW bimbo-mascot Missy Hyatt the morning before the show.
- b) Being called a "a buck-toothed good for nothing goof" and physically threatened on Florida cable television by lady wrestler Penelope Paradise the afternoon before the show.
- c) Being told to "Get in the ring, Asshole!" by Lou Perez as he stood red-faced and nose-to-nose with me at the independent card the night before SuperBrawl.
- d) Being threatened with expulsion by WCW security chief Doug Dillinger during the show.
- e) Meeting wrestling's dentist, Mike Lano.

17. Tri-State Wrestling promoter Joel Goodhart responded to the deadly Acquired Immune Deficiency virus health threat by:

- a) passing out free condoms at his shows to customers and wrestlers.
- b) holding seminars on safe sex practices for the wrestlers before the matches.
- c) contributing 10 percent of a card's gross to the World Heath Organization.
- d) offering clean needles to any steroid users in the promotion.
- e) promoting a "First Blood Battle Royal" where the winner is the only man out of 20 who has not begun to bleed.

18. Special Astrology Section: What will be the single biggest highlight in pro wrestling in 1992?

- a) A Jushin Liger vs. Ricky Steamboat 45 minute draw at the Great American

Bash.

b) Akira Maeda making an unannounced appearance at the Hogan vs. Tenryu match and breaking Hogan's eye socket with a shoot kick and spilling a bag of used steroid needles and empty drug bottles of Hogan's fallen body.

c) "Hitman" Bret Hart vs. Shawn Michaels for the Intercontinental Title at SummerSlam.

d) Kenta Kobashi vs. The Great Muta in the Tokyo Dome.

e) Torch editor, Wade Keller, demanding at a press conference that Vince McMahon pee into a bottle to prove that he is not on steroids.

19. "Chaz" is the name of:

- a) a feminine hygiene product.
- b) a chain of hairstyling salons.
- c) a candybar filled with fruits and nuts.



d) a wrestler in the GWF.

20. Three of these quotes are stupid public statements by former WCW Vice President Jim Herd. Which one is actually a stupid public statement by U.S. President Dan Quayle?

a) You're talking about a guy (Ric Flair) that's never told the truth in his life."

b) "If Vince claims he has steroid tests, then he'll be lying. We won't have them, so we won't lie."

c) "We can't dance as fast as they can," referring to the WWF after WCW introduced Oz.

d) "I've never failed at anything in my life."

e) "What a terrible thing indeed to lose one's mind."

21. Special Essay Question: Explain in a thousand words or less what happened to "The Boss" in the GWF. Then go explain it to Joe Pedicino.

22. Titan Sports charged their fans up to thirty dollars to watch a shoddy, incoherent Survivor Series. Management responded to this gaffe by:

- a) apologizing to their fans.
- b) promising to do better next time.
- c) sending customers a bottle of Hulk Hogan vitamins (the injectable kind).
- d) immediately telling fans to order another bad show four days later at an additional charge.

23. "Continental Lover" Eddie Mansfield convinced some big money investors he was the man to run a successful pro wrestling company. What was the most impressive part of his resume?

- a) His long record of no-shows as a main event wrestler in the Southwest.
- b) His nauseating appearance on the ABC news show 20/20 where he sliced his forehead with a razor blade to reveal to a stunned world that professional wrestling was - "gasp!" - fake.
- c) His subsequent unpopularity and lack of contacts in the wrestling business.
- d) His total absence from the sport after that 1984 TV appearance.

24. Name the last team to hold the prestigious WCW six-man World Tag Team Championship:

- a) Terry Taylor, Barry Horowitz, and Bob Cook (where Taylor did the job when they lost the belts).
- b) Mike, David, and Chris Von Erich.
- c) Hunchback #1, Creature #2, and Cruel Connection #1.
- d) Dustin Rhodes.

25. Amazing, but true, category - Pick the television wrestling announcer from the following list who did the best, most professional job in the year 1991:

- a) Eric Bischoff with over three years experience.
- b) Lord Alfred Hayes with over a decade experience.
- c) Gorilla Monsoon with over a decade experience.
- d) Gordon Solie with over three decades experience.

e) Scott Hudson, not quite completing one full year of service.

26. Sting is marketed as WCW's number one star and greatest wrestler because:

- a) of the sellout crowds that turn up at his every live appearance.
- b) of the record setting arbitron ratings whenever he appears on T.V.

c) of the huge buyrate generated whenever he headlines a WCW pay-per-view show.

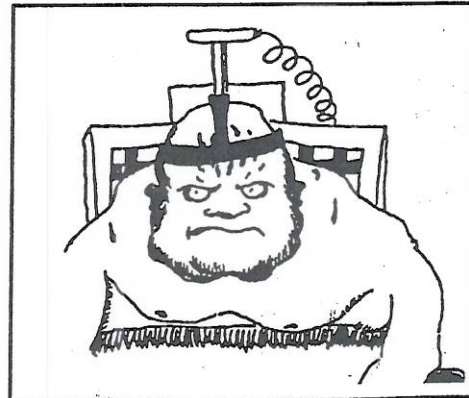
d) Jim Herd and Jack Petrick have to justify the enormous salary he makes to upper-management somehow.

27. Pick the professional wrestling manager from the following list who did not work for one of the two major promotions during the year 1991:

- a) Downtown Bruno, aka Harvey Whippleman.
- b) Big Daddy Dink.
- c) Mr. Fuji.
- d) Lady Blossom.
- e) Slick.
- f) Diamond Dallas Page.
- g) Coach.
- h) Lanny Poffo.
- i) The WCW make-up gal.
- j) Jim Cornette.

28. Which of the following did not appear on a WCW show this year:

- a) Dorothy.
- b) a live electrocution.
- c) Missy Hyatt's breasts.
- d) a live bear.
- e) the Cowardly Lion.
- f) a guy pretending to play the guitar.

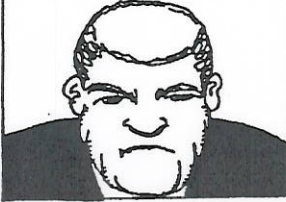


A TALK WITH JIM HERD.

THIS IS JIM HERD,
AND W.C.W. REALLY
SUCKS.



I FIRST BLAMED
DUSTY, STILL DO!



THE COMMITTEE
WOULD NOT WORK
TO MY SATISFACTION.



I PUT THE BLAME
ON THAT JERK
GEORGE SCOTT,



THEN I POINTED
TO OLE ANDERSON
AS A SACRIFICE.



I FINALLY GOT RID
OF FLAIR. THAT
WAS TOUGH TO DO.



NOW I BLAME THOSE
HARDCORE SHEET
SMARTASSES!



BUT NOW I HAVE A
PROBLEM WITHOUT
AN ANSWER?



WHO CAN I
BLAME NOW?
I AM ALONE.



g) a live monkey.

h) a guy with a red siren on his head.

i) Terry Gordy.

e) Chris Von Erich died.

29. What stopped the return of the Von Erich name to the top of the wrestling world?

a) Fritz Von Erich did not follow up with a show in Texas Stadium.

b) Kevin Von Erich could not do interviews on wrestling shows about it since no one will hire him.

c) Kerry no longer wrestles under the Von Erich name.

d) The Dallas wrestling market is burned out.

30. Under the stewardship of Vice President Jim Herd, WCW lost over an estimated 20 million dollars in three years, handed Titan Sports WCW's World Champion and Wrestlemania main event on a silver platter, and became an utter laughing stock. Jack Petrik responded to this crisis situation in 1991 by:

a) demoting Herd to Vice President of the ring crew under Klondike Bill.

b) assigning Herd to the CNN outpost in Kuwait.

c) making Herd live up to his word by apologizing in print to Ric Flair for calling him a liar.

d) firing Herd and then resigning in shame.

e) signing Herd to a two-year contract extension which luckily ended in two months upon Herd's resignation.

31. Special Media Category #2 - Titan Sports owner Vince McMahon Jr. appeared in *Sports Illustrated* in 1991 under a beautiful, full-length portrait of:

a) his grandfather, Jess McMahon.

b) his father, Vince McMahon.

c) his wife, Linda McMahon.

d) John Gotti.

e) himself.

32. Special Media Category #3 - Last year, *Torch* editor Wade Keller had one of his photos of wrestler Derrick Dukes printed as a full page color cover in the mainstream, prestigious *National Sports Daily*. The day after the cover was on the newsstand around the country:

a) Photographer Annie Leibovitz of *Vanity Fair* called to offer Keller a job as her assistant.

b) The Rhode Island Institute of Art offered Keller a full four-year scholarship.

c) The Minneapolis Museum of Art scheduled a retrospective of Keller's work.

d) *The National Sports Daily* folded the next day and a lot of people lost their jobs.

33. When big wrestling star Sid Vicious lost his stretcher match with El Gigante at SuperBrawl and succumbed to the claw, he reacted by:

a) taking a ride on a stretcher just as the promotion promised in advertising.

b) lying on the mat and writhing in agony.

c) crying tears of shame.

d) immediately leaping to his feet with a big grin on his face and trotting to the locker room.

34. Titan Sports changed the venue for Wrestlemania from the 100,000 seat outdoor Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to the 20,000 seat indoor Sports Arena because:

a) A sellout at the Coliseum simply

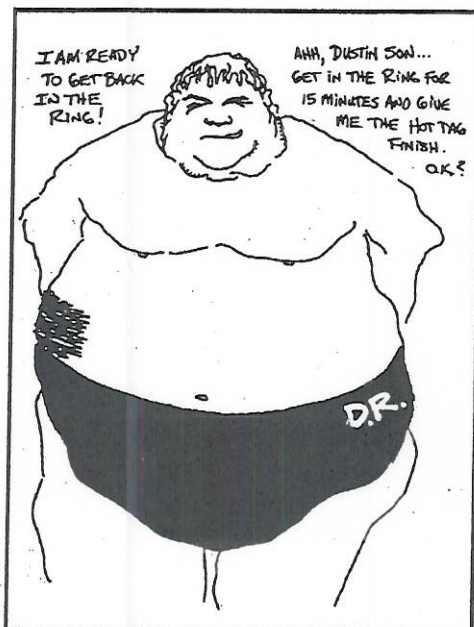
would have generated too much money. There is such a thing as corporations too greedy, you know. Like, the 80s are over.

b) Hulk Hogan is such a famous symbol of America and Christianity that international terrorists might have tried to attack him from the skies. Not that he couldn't handle it, but one of his little Hulkamaniacs could have been hurt. Hey, it's possible.

c) It might have rained and some of the fans might have caught a cold. Titan was simply keeping the fans health in mind, after all, in professional wrestling, the fans have always come first.

d) Titan could not sell enough tickets to fill much beyond the ground seats.

35. "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes did not return to the ring to beat Lex Luger for the WCW World Title because:



a) He was too out of shape to perform in a wrestling ring.

b) The fans are still sick of him.

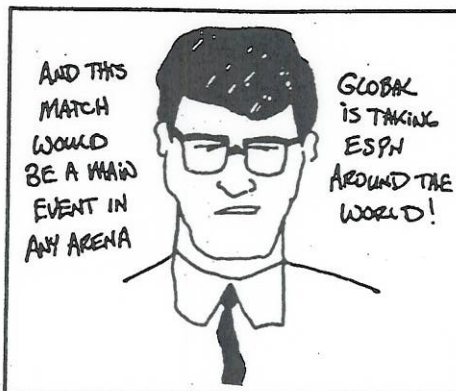
c) He gave his word that he would stay retired.

d) It would cause the promotion to lose a lot of money.

e) He wanted to give his son the chance to step out of his rotund shadow.

f) His ego is under control and he just wanted to concentrate on doing his booking job.

g) None of the above. Herd just wouldn't let him.



36. "Cementhead" Craig Johnson is the Global Wrestling Federation's premier announcer because:

a) of his sing-song delivery.

b) he can't keep a straight face when the heels do interviews, so no one at home will take them seriously.

c) he is larger than all the Global wrestlers and makes them look puny in comparison.

d) of his slicked back hair.

e) Marc Lowrance was not available.

37. Todd Champion will be remembered in 1991 for:

a) his Vanilla Ice skunk hairdo.

b) his phony military uniform.

c) his incredibly big nose.

d) being one half of the silliest tag team of the year.

e) screwing up the finish of every Patriots main event.

f) his nickname.

g) all of the above.

38. Jimmy Snuka, Sgt. Slaughter, Greg Valentine, Col. Mustafa, "Skinner" Steve Keirn, The Bushwackers, and General Adnon all spent the year:

a) collecting social security.

b) working wrestling nostalgia tours with Edmund Farhat.

c) in the Washed Up Old Wrestlers Home.

d) "wrestling" for the WWF.

39. The following is a list of wrestlers' gimmicks. All but one actually appeared in the USWA promotion last year. Pick that single unusable gimmick.

a) "The Gravedigger" - Where do they

get their ideas?

b) "The Black Cat" - some guy in Halloween Kitty-cat mask.

c) "The Snowman" - hey, these guys a look alike.

d) "Driver Tony" - the Valet of Parkin

e) "The Warrior" - but not that one fortunately.

f) "The King of Wrestling" - Didn't the Lawler guy used to be a big star?

g) "The Spirit of America" - Give Hoot, don't Pollute!

h) "The Good Wrestler" - got a bigger push than Jeff Jarrett.

40. What 1991 honor will mean the most to the Voice of WCW and this country's best wrestling broadcaster, Jin Ross?

a) *Pro Wrestling Torch* readers' poll "Best Announcer" award.

b) *Wrestling Observer* readers' poll "Best Announcer" award.

c) *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* readers' poll (you know, the one where the reader gets the ballots after wrestlers have posed with their plaques and a week before the year-end issue goes to press) "Favorite Announcer" award by four-million votes over Gorilla Monsoon.

d) Breaking the record for most on-screen appearances and on-air mentioned on WCW broadcasts set by Dusty Rhodes in 1985.

Now you may check your answers with the answer key below and then compare your scores with the "Official Certified Smart Fan Scale" to see where you stand in comparison with other fans.

ANSWER KEY: 1-h; 2-no answer; 3-d; 4-d; 5-g; 6-no lawsuit; 7-h; 8-d; 9-a; 10-d; 11-d; 12-b; 13-no answer; 14-d; 15-f; 16-b; 17-e; 18-e; 19-d; 20-e; 21-Joe Don't Know; 22-d; 23-d; 24-Who Cares; 25-e; 26-d; 27-j; 28-i; 29-e; 30-e; 31-e; 32-d; 33-d; 34-d; 35-g; 36-e; 37-g; 38-d; 39-h; 40-d

SMART FAN SCALE: 40 - You Cheated; 35-39 - Dave Meltzer; 30-34 - Get A Life!; 25-29 - Bill Apter; 10-24 - Hockey Fan; 5-9 Jim Herd; 1-4 - Herb Abrams; 0 - Well Adjusted.

[Bruce Mitchell and John Hitchcock of Greensboro, N.C. have been contributing to *Pro Wrestling Torch* since the Sept. 6, 1990 edition. Bruce is a monthly columnist and John is a staff cartoonist. John also owns a comic book store called "Parts Unknown".]

PORTLAND WRESTLING

**AFTER NEARLY 25 YEARS, DON OWEN'S
PORTLAND PRO WRESTLING GOES OFF THE AIR:
A RETROSPECTIVE by Greg Anderson**

One of the more surprising incidents to occur in the mat world in 1991 was the cancellation of the "Portland Pro Wrestling" television show by KPTV Channel 12 after nearly 25 years of continuous broadcasts.

The marriage of Don Owen Promotions and the station seemed to be an inseparable union. Area fans took for granted the show would always be there so when news of the program's demise came, the loyal followers were shocked.

In the last few years, however, there were tell-tale signs that the ratings were in bad shape. Preemptions were rare for most of the show's run but during 1989-90, episodes were frequently bumped by other programming, one time by a showing of the pilot for the television series "Kung Fu". In addition, the time was pushed from 11 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

late last year to make room for "Night Court" reruns of which there were five episodes during the week already. Another blow to the show came when the chief sponsor, Tom Peterson's Appliances, was forced to file Chapter 11 bankruptcy. KPTV management said that as the ratings were falling, the production costs which the station was paying for increased to such levels that it became unfeasible to keep the show on the air. Also, the station was looking to rent out the equipment that was tied up at the Portland Sports Arena every Saturday night.

One of the feature matches of the first episode in the fall of 1967 pitted "Tough" Tony Borne against Jungle Jim in a hair vs. hair match. Jim sported shoulder-length hair and the sight of Borne jumping around tossing Jim's locks all over the squared circle is one that is indelibly etched in my memory.

The show actually started in the 50s on

KPTV, which at the time was a UHF station on channel 27, as well as an ABC affiliate. KOIN, channel 6 (CBS), then ran the show for a few years before it dropped the show. A few weeks later, KPTV, now an independent on channel 12, took the program back.

The new Portland Wrestling show was placed in prime time on Friday nights at 8:30 p.m. The show was still in black-and-white and ran for an hour. Furthermore, it aired live from the regular weekly house show at the old Portland Armory. The Channel 6 version was hosted by a diminutive announcer by the name of Bob McNulty, who was literally scared to death of the heels and cowered in a corner whenever a fight broke out during an interview. Channel 12's version was hosted by a newcomer named Frank Bonnema.

Bonnema did not start out to be a polished wrestling play-by-play man, so he was paired with wrestler Pepper Martin, who familiarized Bonnema with the names of holds and moves. Bonnema was a quick

study, however, and within weeks he was able to go solo. Bonnema's style was very low-key. Rarely did he get into confrontations with heels. He remained unattached and let the wrestlers be the stars. He was the calm and steady bystander amidst the chaos wrought by the participants. Bonnema had his own labels for some of the maneuvers in the ring. For example, when a wrestler would thwart a pin attempt by kicking out, Bonnema called it a "flail kick". A backbody drop was dubbed a "shoulder throw".

The show underwent several changes as far as day, time, location, and cosmetics. At one point, the time was moved to 9:30 p.m. The show still was broadcast live but the latter part of the house shows instead of the beginning. Many times the show came on with the main event in progress.

Later, it went back to 8:30 p.m. When the armory was renovated to become a brewery, the cards moved to the Expo Center until the city could find the matches a new home. They found a bowling alley that could be transformed into a sports arena. Owen told the city that he could not buy the facility outright. The city renovated the building for Owen and got him a good deal. It took Owen 15 years to pay off the building and he also had to give the city 6 percent of everything he made promoting.

Owen changed the house shows to Saturday nights so the live TV show went with them. The show was so popular that channel 12 gave it another half-hour of air time. Color was finally added in 1971. In 1973, the live broadcasts ended and the shows were tape-delayed for two-and-a-half hours. The show had featured some dog-collar matches that were so violent, the station wanted to be able to edit the programs if necessary.

Bonnema was the host of the first color show. Radio man Don Coss pinch-hit for Frank, who had suffered a heart attack. Coss did not hit it off very well with wrestler Dutch Savage. Savage did not appreciate Coss's sense of humor, as he felt Owen was making light of the "sport" of professional wrestling. Savage let his feelings be known in a shoot interview. When Coss introduced Savage as the "Savageman", the wrestler lit into Coss, saying, "I'm not a savageman, my name is Dutch Savage!" He then threatened to put a hold on Coss to show him how serious the mat game was. Tony Borne did color during the first two weeks Owen filled

in for Bonnema. Heart trouble would continue to plague Bonnema, who quit smoking and became a prominent anti-smoking advocate in the area. In the fall of 1982, Bonnema suffered another heart attack and many-times director of the wrestling show, Chuck Grindell, took his place one week, with Dutch Savage doing color.

The following week, with Bonnema still in the hospital, Coss was called back into action and Savage was again the color man. Whatever heat there had been between them years earlier was apparently gone now and the two were very cordial to each other. Both men tried to reassure viewers that Bonnema would recover and once again host the show. The next week, however, they had to make the sad announcement that Bonnema had passed away.

Coss and Savage blended well together, and Savage even made jokes during the matches. Later, when Savage dropped completely out of the wrestling scene, Stan Stasiak, a former WWF Champion, took his place on color. When Stasiak left to take another job in Canada, Coss started announcing solo. During this time, Coss worked a relaxed style ala Bonnema. To be honest, the wrestling at the time did not exactly inspire excitement.

Things changed after Len Denton took over the booking slot from Rip Oliver. Denton, along with ghost booker Roddy Piper, picked up the action. At the same time, Coss's announcing style picked up as well. The heretofore reticent Coss now became a more involved part of the show. He would get excited during angles or when the action in the ring was hot. He would argue with the heels and was generally more enthusiastic about his surroundings.

In the early days, the TV shows usually consisted of two prelim matches and a two-out-of-three falls "TV main event". There were interviews between bouts which were conducted in the booth, affectionately known as the crow's nest. Many angles took place in this elevated section of the arena. Innumerable fights and attacks erupted there over the years. When Denton was the booker, he slowly phased out the multi-fall matches to go along with the quicker pace of the show.

The big constant throughout the years has been the fact that the show has always emanated weekly from the Portland area

cards. Squash matches always took a back seat to more competitive events.

Much of the appeal of the show was the soap opera scenarios that tied each episode together. Viewers just had to tune in each week to find out if it just might be the night that Lonnie Mayne finally blew up at his abusive mentor Tony Borne or if Jonathon Boyd would get his bloody boomerang shoved where the sun don't shine.

And yes, the blade was utilized quite frequently on television. No digitized picture, no censoring of any kind. In the days before the AIDS epidemic and the Oregon commission, blood was an effective way of furthering feuds or adding realism to the matches.

Then there were the sponsors. The two chief sponsors in the early days were "Friendly Chevrolet" and "Tom Peterson's Appliances". The car dealership was owned by "Friendly" Joe Kahan, who did his own commercials for many years. When Kahan moved to Hawaii, he left his business in the hands of general manager "Country" John Denton, who invited prospective car buyers to "come in and kick a tire or two". Denton was once featured on the NBC show "Real People" when they ran a search for the most colorful car dealer in America. As flamboyant as these two men were, they had a way to go to catch up to Peterson.

Sporting an eternal flat-top crewcut, Peterson waxed enthusiastically about his stores and the televisions, VCRs, stereos, and washers and dryers that could be bought in them. He would jolt viewers by seemingly knocking on the inside of their screens and shouting, "Wake up, wake up!" He would give away free watches bearing his likeness away with purchases. He even offered free "Tom Peterson haircuts" to entice people into the store.

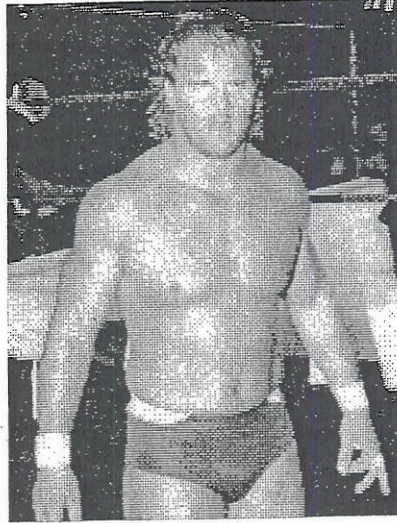
"Friendly Chevrolet" eventually went out of business but Peterson hung on (just barely) until the final wrestling episode on December 28, 1991. In addition to the regularly taped commercials that appeared on all the local stations, Peterson did many

exclusive spots from the arena on Saturday nights. *People Magazine* even ran a feature on Tom a few years back.

Peterson and Kahan once participated in an angle with the Royal Kangaroos, Jonathan Boyd and Norman Frederick Charles III. One night the Australian heels attacked Kahan and ripped up his suit jacket. Kahan did a terrible acting job during the angle. Subsequently he and Peterson placed a bounty on the Kangaroos

which resulted in several teams coming in from other territories to try and collect.

Of course, it is impossible to do a review of the history of the Portland Wrestling TV show without a partial list of the stars who appeared on it. Some of these include: Roddy Piper, Jimmy Snuka, Buddy Rose, Gino Hernandez, Boyd, Rick Martel, the Shepherders, Eric Embry, Bobby Shane,



CURT HENNIG

Mayne, Luther Lindsay, Jay Youngblood, Ripper Collins, Beauregarde, Iron Sheik, Sgt. Slaughter, Curt Hennig, Matt Borne, Jesse Barr, "Avalanche" Paul Neu, Chris Adams, Magnum TA, Bull Ramos, Mad Dog Vachon, Don Muraco, Adrian Adonis, Red Bastien, Dizzy Hogan (Ed Leslie), Brady Boone, Andre the Giant, Ric Flair, Harley Race, Dory Funk Jr., Jesse Ventura, Jack Brisco, Greg Valentine, Rip Rogers, Tom Zenk, Dynamite Kid, Rocky Ventura (Dan Kroffat), Tommy Rogers, Brian Adias, Killer Tim Brooks, Lanny Poffo, Chavo and Mando Guerrero, Austin Idol, King Parsons, Rocky Johnson, Billy Jack Haynes, John Nord, Steve Regal, Buzz Sawyer, Scandor Akbar, Mr. Fuji, Tully Blanchard, Don Leo Jonathan, Gene Kiniski, Dutch Savage, and Mark Lewin.

At press time, there have been ongoing negotiations between Don Owen and FOX affiliate KPDX to put the show back on the air. If a deal is struck, it will be great. However, fans won't soon forget the long-time relationship between channel 12 and "Portland Wrestling".

[Greg Anderson is a long-time follower of Portland Wrestling. He currently resides in Washington State.]

THE REAL STORY BEHIND THE PRESS MEETING AT TITAN TOWERS

WHY BRUISER BRODY WAS MURDERED

By Wade Keller

I can no longer keep it a secret. When a group of around a dozen journalists met last August, the Friday before Summerslam, many people expected an amazing, dramatic conversation to take place. Instead, Vince McMahon never really said much to us. But rather than stopping there, as thus far Dave Meltzer, John Arezzi, and I have done, I must reveal exactly what did happen when I was invited to Titan Towers in August of 1991.

At first, I thought the meeting was just a ploy to convince Dave Meltzer, John Arezzi, the other journalists, and I to lay off, to take it easy on them, for a sum of some money. Instead, it turns out that not only did they want to become more familiar with us, but they simply wanted Dave, John, and me to evaluate a new character because they claimed they had tremendous respect for our opinions.

The new character was not Rasta the Voo Doo Man. It was not The Hunchback. The new character was called "The Psychic".

Each of us agreed to watch him do his work. We were brought into the Prime Time studios which were gimmicked with smoke and background music and mystic lighting. "The Psychic" was going through his hokey motions of predicting the future of Hulk Hogan and that Ric Flair would win the World Title at the Royal Rumble, blah, blah, blah. It was pretty boring. John, Dave, and I looked at each other and our faces showed we agreed this was a dud of a gimmick. Just before I was about to speak up, the intercom rang and called for an emergency meeting, something about Hellwig destroying McMahon's office.

Vince McMahon, Steve Planamenta, and the rest of the "Titan Thugs" quickly left the studios and returned to Titan Towers - a separate building a few blocks away from the Titan TV and production and Prime Time studios.

"The Psychic" took off his goofy hat and said, "I bet you guys think this is just a

dumb gimmick."

John, Dave, and I looked at each other, laughed a little, and John said, "I think I speak for all of us in saying that this gimmick will likely win the 'Worst Gimmick of the Year' award if the WWF decides to use it."

The Psychic said, with a tinge of anger in his voice, "That's what everyone thinks. They think I'm a fake. Well, that's why I'm here, prostituting myself as a gimmick manager in pro wrestling." His voice grew louder. "This is no gimmick! I am a real psychic."

Dave whispered to me, "We're on candid camera. I know it."

"I heard that," said The Psychic, who could not have possibly heard it; I barely could.

"I'll prove that I'm for real, but you can never tell anyone. I just want you to realize I am for real. After all, if I make it big in Titan, I could be a pretty valuable source for you guys, huh?"

"Indeed," I thought to myself, as likely did Dave and John.

"Prove it," said Dave, willing to play along with what was surely just a game.

"All three of you join hands with me around this table," The Psychic said.

We each pulled up a chair and surrounded his table. I joined hands with John and The Psychic. Dave did the same.

The Psychic began humming and asked us to hum, too.

John looked at Dave and me and asked, "Have we gone far enough? You know Vince is having a blast taping this. This is going to be the pregame show to his SummerSlam party next Monday."

The Psychic said, "John..." and continued on with some personal comments about John. He looked shocked.

"How did you know that," said John.

"And Wade," said the Psychic, "You..." and stated things that happened in my life that even I forgot.

Dave was next.

We were convinced.

We started humming.

"I need something that all three of you care deeply about. I need to know something you all have in common. It will take all three of you. It will take all three of you. Hmmmmmm."

"Bruiser Brody's murder," said Dave. "We want to know what happened and why Bruiser Brody was murdered."

"Yeah."

"Good one, Dave."

"You all agree?" asked The Psychic.

"Yes," we said in unison.

"Hold hands tightly, hum, and think about everything you remember or know concerning the murder of this Bruiser Brody you speak of."

We hummed, we thought, we remembered, we wondered.

The Psychic's head popped up, his back became stiff, and he began talking. His voice changed with each character...

"Really, Verne. The main event already! Golly gee, thanks."

"Well Bruiser, I'm always willing to give a new kid on the block a break."

"I was kidding, idiot. I'm a legitimate main event wrestler. Usually, when I main event around the world, I get paid for it, too."

"What! Promoters paid you for the privilege to wrestle for them?"

"Yes. In fact, in Japan for just six days of wrestling I make over \$10,000."

"Those Japs don't know how to treat their wrestlers. Well, I guess we can arrange something. I tell ya' what, kid. After a couple months of main events against my son, Greg Gagne, we'll see how it draws and pay you after that."

"Fine. Two things, though. I'm not doing no job for your puny son, Greg, and I get paid ahead of time."

The Psychic's voice grew stern for the first time.

"You better watch the way you talk to me, Mr. Brody. We know some people in Puerto Rico who don't take kindly to people who talk to me like that."

"Verne, you may not know this. I know that you're not really Verne Gagne and that guy you call Greg is not your son. Those two were killed as a result of that plane crash Ric Flair was in a decade ago."

"H-h-h-h-how did you know?"

"I have my sources. And I happen to know some people in Japan who don't take too kindly to people like phoney World Champions yelling at me. I not only know that the real Verne and Greg Gagne, two great people as far as I'm concerned, were crushed on the ground when that plane crashed, but I know all about who you really are."

"Who are we, then, Mr. Brody."

"Well, 'Verne', you are not only former AWA Champion, you are the current WWC Champion, Carlos Colon."

"And 'Greg'?"

"Well, he is, of course, Jose Gonzales."

"You do know! You aren't going to tell anyone, are you?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"I'll do anything. I mean, my real family back in Puerto Rico doesn't know of my second life here in the United States. And Donna Gagne still doesn't know her father was killed ten years ago."

"I tell ya' what, I will let you continue to live your two lives as Carlos Colon and Verne Gagne under two conditions. First, you give me one million dollars a year for the next ten years. And second, while pretending to be Verne Gagne, continue on your current course of stupid and ridiculous promoting so there is nothing left for 'your son' Greg - I mean Jose - to take over when you die. And by the looks of you, it should be pretty soon."

"Ten years of a million dollars a year is too much. I could only handle five years. How about it? I can pay you a million a year through, say, 1987. But not more. I would be out of money, especially if I continue to cause the AWA to lose money."

"No. Ten years of a million dollars a year or I will expose you to all!"

"Okay. I guess I don't have a choice. I've got to leave now. I have a match against Abdullah the Butcher in Puerto Rico in fifteen hours. My plane leaves in thirty minutes."

"Thanks, Verne, or should I call you Carlos, or is there another personality I don't know about?"

"No others. 'Verne' is fine."

"I believe this was quite a profitable discussion for at least one of us."

"Indeed."

"That's it. Hey guys, that's it."

The Psychic was back to his normal voice, he was sweating, we were sweating.

"So, what happened," John asked.

"What do you mean?" asked The Psychic.

"How did Brody get killed. Can we reenact that incident?"

"I'm worn out," said The Psychic.

"We need to know," said Dave.

"Okay, let's try," said the Psychic.

"Hold hands and hum."

We hummed. We sweat some more. We hummed.

The Psychic's head popped up again, his back got stiff, and he once again began talking in weird voices.

"Yeah, he knows all about us. He says if we try anything, he knows people in Japan who will take care of us in a painful, torturous way."

"Gee, Dad, how did..."

"No one is around, Jose. You can drop that phoney Midwest accent and call me Carlos."

"Yeah, sorry. I just hate to take chances. How did he find out about us, Carlos?"

"I don't know. He knew about Kerry's accident, losing the foot and all, too."

"There's no way our funding will last past 1987 at this rate."

"Hmmm. Well, we'll have to think of something when the time comes."

The Psychic opened one eye, grinned ever so slightly, and said, "The time has come."

"Let's do it," we said.

The humming began once again. The neck stiffened.

"We're out of money, Mr. Brody. I told you there is no way our funding would last past 1987. I cannot pay you."

"Well, I'm going to take a shower and when I come out, you better have an answer. If you don't, I'll make that long-distance call to Japan and tomorrow you will have a problem no amount of money will get you out of. Ever heard of a guy named Atsushi Onita?"

"No."

"You will if you fail to pay me. Let's just say that when he was five, for fun, he would steal a knife from the dinner table, cut himself in twenty-some different places, lie on his back in his bed, bleed, and then step into the bathroom, pour tobasco sauce on himself, and then take a hot shower. He got off on that kind of stuff. Speaking of hot showers, you've got five minutes and I'll be back."

"Jose, what should we do."

"I don't know Carlos. But that Onita character sounds like someone I would rather not meet."

"How about we turn the tables on Brody and give him a few cuts to show off to Onita. Maybe that will discourage Onita from hassling with us."

"You know how clumsy I am with knives, Carlos."

"Well, Jose, do your best. Here's a knife. Cover it with this towel so you can surprise him."

The Psychic's head relaxed, his eyes opened, and he asked us, "Do you believe now?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"I must go now. I know I can make a lot more money than the WWF is going to pay me. This incident, with your help, has convinced me that the real world needs me. Please, don't mention this to anyone. When Vince and that Plantamenta guy and the others ask what happened to me, tell them I just disappeared in a puff of smoke. Make them wonder."

"You got it," said John.

We shook his hand, promised each other to keep it secret, and left the studio.

We asked the person at the front desk where Vince McMahon was.

"Oh, he left a message that the tour is over. Call him Monday and he will explain everything. He apologizes for not being able to wish you guys off."

"Thanks. We'll catch a cab back to the headquarters where our limo is waiting," I said.

We were pretty shaken, but we realized on the way back that even if we told people about the incident, no one would believe us.

[This story is dedicated to everyone who tried to figure out what happened at the Titan Towers press meeting. Now please stop speculating on what really happened and enjoy a good Flair-Steamboat rerun.]

LEX LUGER

BEING WORLD CHAMPION WASN'T ENOUGH... IT WASN'T THE "BIG TIME"

BY JEFF BOWDREN

"Big time, I'm on my way, I'm making it..."

"Big time, so much larger than life."

-Peter Gabriel's "Big Time"

It was early 1987 and my old buddy, Jeff Steele went to a UWF show in a high school gym in Vicksburg, Miss. The place was packed to the rafters with diehard fans. They were reacting to every move, the concessions were selling briskly, and the atmosphere in the building was hot. Jeff mentioned the great crowd and atmosphere to road agent Jack Curtis Jr. whom he had known for many years. Jack said he was not happy because the wrestlers were in a bad mood because the boys didn't like working in a small venue. Jeff reminded him of the local struggling economy and that a bigger venue would cost more. That would mean higher ticket prices, smaller concession sales, and quite possibly, fewer fans. Jack said he understood, but that the wrestlers wanted to work at the "big arenas". Jeff asked Jack if he was saying the wrestlers would rather work in front of fewer fans, perhaps less enthusiastic, who would probably spend less on concessions, all for the sake of working in a "better (i.e. bigger) building"? Jack said Jeff had pretty much summed it up. Jeff then remarked that with an attitude like that, the company would not last long. A week later, Bill Watts sold the company to Jim Crockett.

This is a mindset that permeates the entire industry - the perception of what is or isn't "big time".

You have to hand it to old Vince, greatest snake oil salesperson in the history of wrestling. He sells a you bill of goods, and when it doesn't work (no pun intended), he baffles you with so much bull that he manages to convince you that not only does it work, but that it works better than anyone elses. But what makes it even more remarkable is Vince hires other people to sell his snake oil and pays them less than the competitor pays because he convinces his employees how much more prestigious it is to sell his snake oil.

Lex Luger has become the latest to fall under Snake Oil Vince's magic spell. Indications suggest Vince, tongue no doubt flickering, may have convinced Luger to walk away from a position as world champion and a lucrative guaranteed contract to work for him for less money. All for the prestige of being "big time".

Luger has always seemed destined for the "big time". He was selected by Bill Apter to be the new Hulk Hogan in the mid-80s, which was about the time that McMahon stopped allowing Apter's photographers at ringside. So Luger, for a variety of reasons, was thrust into a position of being the sun around which Florida revolved. Unfortunately, he was woefully ill-prepared.

Oh, sure, he had "the look". As a picture in a magazine, Luger was everything you could want. Inside the ring, Luger's lack of ability was obvious. He was stiff, robotic, and lacked endurance. In front of the camera, he appeared nervous and unsure of himself, a far cry from the college graduate Gordon Solie claimed him to be. The promotion did their best to hide him by

programming him with Jesse Barr and Barry Windham, the two best wrestlers in the promotion. The fall of '86 saw Luger wrestle a disappointing match with Ric Flair at the Battle of the Belts III. No matter how good Gordon Solie told fans Luger was, he still stunk.

Now up to this point, Luger had only been in the ring with the top workers in the promotion. After the Flair match, Luger was programmed with guys like Ed Gantner and Kareem Muhammed. Tape collectors are not banging down each others' doors to get copies of those matches. Luger's weaknesses became more apparent as the quality of his opponents went down.

"The place where I come from is a small town,

They think so small

They use small words, but not me

I'm smarter than that..."

-Peter Gabriel's "Big Time"

Luger left Florida to work for Jim Crockett and as he left late in 1986, to his credit, he did jobs, including a famous one where Bruiser Brody showed him a darker side of the business. It was upon his arrival to Crockett that he was dubbed the "Total Package" and quickly thrust into the main event spotlight as one of the Horsemen. Booker Dusty Rhodes obviously realized Luger's physical potential, but also took great pains to hide Luger's inadequacies by putting him in tag matches with Tully Blanchard, Arn Anderson, and Ric Flair. Luger also served as a scenic backdrop on Horsemen interviews (of which there were seemingly an endless supply of) by wearing a smug look on his face and wearing a collegiate looking sweater. Ironically, but just standing there and not exposing his weaknesses, Luger got over huge as a cocky, preppy type. This was perhaps Luger's finest hour in a heel role.

Over the next two years, Luger wrestled a variety of opponents. Oh sure, there were the moments with Rhodes and Nikita Koloff, men who did not have the ability in the ring to hide Luger's deficiencies, but on a far more frequent basis, he was in the ring with Blanchard, Anderson, Flair, or Windham. These men were there naturally for the purpose of establishing Luger as a superstar and creating a professional wrestler. The close of 1988 and Starrcade had Luger showcased against Flair. This was the end of Rhodes and his reign of terror and things behind the scenes were in disarray. The finish at Starrcade was supposed to be a clean pinfall

for Flair, but Luger balked at looking at the lights, supposedly after a conversation with the soon-to-be-departing Rhodes. Luger, up to that point, had only done one job, for Rhodes at Starrcade '87.

In 1989, Luger dramatically improved. He won the "most improved wrestler" award in the 1989 *Wrestling Observer Yearbook*. He finally seemed to be living up to the years of hype. And why shouldn't he? After all, he spent a whole year working against Flair, Steamboat, Windham, and Brian Pillman. It would be tough not to improve under those circumstances. Then, 1990 started great for Luger as he had a terrific match with Flair at *Wrestlewar*. He had the look of a champion and now seemingly was approaching that plateau of having the ability to match.

But something happened. Luger became frustrated with the promotion's unwillingness to award him the world title, something that had apparently been promised. He developed a staph infection in his leg before his next pay-per-view match. He deservedly got credit for wrestling anyway and appeared to be the "company man". What wasn't so great was that for the second time in six months on a pay-per-view he refused to go along with the storyline and allow Ric Flair the pinfall victory. This led to a terrible finish in the cage and left the Flair vs. Luger feud without a decisive conclusion.

The rest of Luger's in-ring activity in 1990 was unmemorable. Luger was again put in a position of working with opponents whose own ability enhanced his. Then came the disastrous 1991 Bash.

The internal politics of WCW had caused Flair to quit and be fired at the same time. Partially in order to justify Luger's salary, the highest in the promotion, he was awarded the WCW World Title.

To be fair to Luger, he was in a no-win situation. The way he won the belt and the way he was turned heel were poorly booked by Dusty Rhodes. It appeared plausible that Rhodes, in a pique of anger at the front office, deliberately programmed Luger with guys like Bill Kazmaier, in effect sabotaging his own world champion. Opponents like Kazmaier could not help but make Luger look bad and certainly did nothing to enhance his already damaged credibility as world champion. Whatever the reason, by the end of '91, the company wanted the belt off of Luger. And Luger, after waiting so long to get it, seemingly did not want it either. Luger may have discovered being at the top also brings with

it the accompanying pressures.

Lex Luger's last date for WCW according to all indications will be Feb. 29, 1992 at the *SuperBrawl II* pay-per-view. He will do the job for Sting and then, in accordance with his WCW contract, not wrestle for any competitors for a year. That leaves the door open for him to join Vince McMahon's World Bodybuilding Federation for the following year before wrestling for the WWF.

Luger's departure raises some questions. Was five years enough service with WCW? Did he get screwed over by WCW enough to finally become sick of it? Was he justified in leaving?

I believe the answer to the first question is yes. Five years with a promotion is plenty. Wrestlers stagnate and need a change of scenery. Luger is no different.

As for question number two, I have no doubt that Luger and a lot of other guys got hosed by the WCW front office. Luger was probably justifiably p.o.ed at being promised the world title and then having the front office renege on the promise. But hey, the same thing happened to Ted DiBiase in '81, Barry Windham in '84, and Jerry Lawler in '85, so it is not like Luger is the only one it has ever happened to.

Finally, was Luger justified in leaving? In my mind, the answer would have to be no. Whether you agree or not, the bottom line is that Luger the person, not the character, signed a lucrative contract with WCW, one that had him in the number one position in the company I might add, and walked away from it. Why? For that opportunity to reach the "big time". No one twisted Luger's arm to sign that contract. But he did. And now, regardless of his or the company's disenchantment, the character of Lex Luger, a character that the company spent five long years on, will be gone, only to show up on the competition's TV show eventually, once again giving the impression that WCW is a minor league promotion.

But in this case, it's not so bad for

WCW. It was stupid to lose Ric Flair and yes, that most definitely made the company look very bad. But Lex Luger? What you are losing is a guy who in five years of being with some of the best workers in the world, never seemed to want to develop his craft. Luger, who was not good enough to play football in Canada or in the U.S.F.L., turned to wrestling.

Luger's biggest problem always seemed to be that he was embarrassed to be a pro wrestler. For all the push he has received from day one and for all the great performers he has worked with, he is not the wrestler one would expect. Oh sure he has improved, but in some ways he has regressed or stayed the same as he was six years ago when he



started. Wrestling ability? He really is not to the point where he can carry a bad worker. Interviews? Well, let's just say he will not be winning any best interview awards. Charisma? Yeah, he has some, but not up to the level of Sting, the Steiners, or even Brian Pillman. Luger has not proven he is a big draw at the gate.

If WCW put half the energy into Pillman or Austin or even Dustin Rhodes that they have put into Luger - meaning putting them in the ring on a nightly basis with guys like Rick Steamboat, Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, and others of similar skill and in-ring wisdom, you would probably end up with a top ten wrestler. You would also have someone who had taken the time to hone his craft and someone who is proud to be a wrestler, not embarrassed.

As for Luger, he will be in the "big time" and WCW will be better off because of it. Goodbye and good riddance.

"Big time, I'm on my way to making it,
Big time, so much larger than life..."
Peter Gabriel's "Big Time"

[Jeff Bowdren of Plantation, Fla., previously a columnist for *Pro Wrestling Torch*, has also contributed articles to the *Wrestling Observer* and *Arena Report* newsletters.]

1991'S ULTIMATE GRUDGE MATCH THAT NEVER WAS "THE HORNET" VS. "THE BLACK OLIVE"

By: The Specific Marc

If there would have been the ultimate match - the culmination of 1991's greatest feud, it would no doubt have been between these two men. The only way they could have been signed against each other would have been to don masks. The following is the calling of the action for "1991's Ultimate Grudge Match that Never Was"...

"Hello fans and welcome back to the Clash. Jim Ross here along with Paul E. Dangerously. Paul, I think it's safe to say that the upcoming bout is the most unusual main event we have ever had on any Clash of the Champions broadcast."

"Without question, Jim. We have two masked men who came to WCW at about the same time. They've run roughshod over the competition on a collision course towards one another and each would like nothing better than to annihilate and embarrass the other here in front of a nationwide viewing audience."

"And it'll be more than just embarrassment for one man, Paul. According to the special 'I-Quit Shoot-Out' stipulations, the loser must not only give up, he must completely remove himself from the wrestling business forever."

"And it's not just mask vs. mask either, Jim. The winner has actually agreed to unmask himself first, since he will be allowed to continue his wrestling career under his normal identity. Of course, he will then have the extreme pleasure of unmasking his opponent, who will never be



THE CHARLOTTE HORNET
(Illustration by Mr. Mike)

allowed to work in this business again."

"Whoever these two guys really are, there must be some deep-rooted hatred between them. They knew no promoter would ever put them in the ring together, so they donned the masks and worked their way to this I-Quit Shoot-Out. They have both demanded these stipulations, and I, for one, can't wait for the outcome. Let's go to Gordon Solie now for a quick look at the makings of this feud."

"Thank you, Jim. We begin with a look at the more mysterious of these two men, the one who calls himself 'The Hornet'. He is very unpredictable, uses both roughhouse and scientific tactics, and never uses the same finishing move twice. One thing we do know is this man must have a very thorough background to be able to master so many different styles and holds. What makes the Hornet truly an enigma is his

refusal to speak in public, perhaps out of the fear that his voice would be recognized, and we respect his wishes in that regard. He does communicate through written statements, and we anticipate a brief one at any moment."

"In the opposite corner this evening, we have 'The Black Olive'. His ring tactics are equally unpredictable, but he does favor that one awesome pinning combination that has garnered him each of his many victories thus far. He likes to catch his opponent coming off the ropes with that vicious double forearm he calls the 'flying anchovy' and then mounts the top rope for the 'peperonni press' that we have yet to see anyone kick out of. Of course, this evening's match can be won only by submission, so we'll see how that will affect the Black Olive's strategy. And now, back to ringside."

"All right, fans, we're just about set, but Paul, I see you've just been given a note from Doug Dillinger. Perhaps you should fill us all in on it."

"We have a pre-match statement issued by the Hornet, Jim. Nothing earth-shaking here. It just says tonight, in his last match under a mask, he wishes to be referred to as the 'Charlotte Hornet'."

"Well, that could prove to be more significant than you think, Paul. If this man is introduced as being from Charlotte, the fans here in Greensboro will almost certainly be swayed over to his side. Fan support in a match of this intensity just might be enough to make the difference."

"Oh, come on, Ross. You're giving these Greensboro geeks way too much credit. I saw one idiot over there holding up some cardboard championship belt that looks like he saved it from his third grade art class. The guy next to him is so dimwitted, his mom was afraid he wouldn't be able to find his seat on his own, so she made him take a sign that says 'Front Row, Section D'. I guess somebody felt sorry for him and pointed him in the right direction. And then there's the jerk with the sign that just says 'Efray Umpbay' - I don't even know what language that is, let alone what it means."

"I should have known you couldn't remain serious very long, but be that as it may, we need to take this short break and we'll be right back with the main event."

The match:

"Gary Capetta has just made the 20-minute call, fans, and to this point, things have swayed back and forth, but neither wrestler has even been close to gaining a submission from his opponent."

"But you have to admit, Ross, the Black Olive currently has the edge over the Charlotte Hornet, much to the chagrin of these Tar Heel twerps."

"Yes, but don't forget, he gained that edge with a low blow when the Hornet was attempting to apply a spinning toe hold. And now there's *another* low blow and the Olive comes off the ropes with that flying anchovy. The Hornet is knocked completely out of the ring, but he's up quickly. He takes four or five steps trying to clear the cobwebs, but now takes a violent face-first fall onto the protective mats."

"Hey Jim, I can't exactly place it, but I know I've seen somebody fall like that before."

"Now the Hornet is back in the ring, but the Olive meets him with a knee in the kidney area and whips him into the turnbuckles. My gosh, the Hornet turned a complete somersault going in, and landed upright on the ring apron. He runs down and climbs the top rope from the outside."

"I'm telling you, Jim, that flip looked familiar, too."

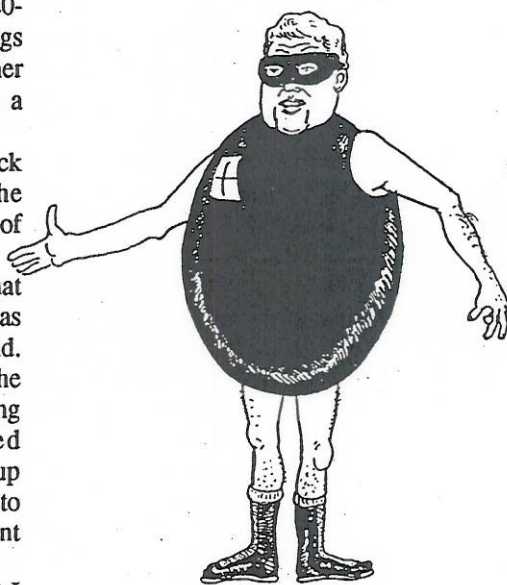
"The Hornet comes down with a big elbow, but out of nowhere the Black Olive lands another flying anchovy. It looks like we'll have our first submission attempt as the Olive goes for the Boston Crab."

"Well, Jim, the Olive is obviously aware of some history of back problems on the part of the Charlotte Hornet, and he's looking to exploit that weakness right here."

"He's motioning to Nick Patrick, Paul. I think the Olive wants the microphone given to the Hornet for the 'I-quit' announcement. But wait a minute, it looks like the Hornet has other ideas. He just shoved the microphone right back at the referee, and the match will continue. The Hornet makes it to the ropes, and the Olive will have to release the hold. That was quite a display of guts by the Hornet, and the fans have once again rallied to his cause. He backs the Olive into the corner and unleashes a vicious series of chops."

"You know, Jim, I've only seen one guy throw chops like that."

"The Black Olive is down from that onslaught, and the Hornet responds with a big kneedrop. He drapes the Olive's knee over the bottom rope, leaps, and comes down hard right on the point. Again and again, and now from the top rope; the



THE BLACK OLIVE
(Illustration by Mr. Mike)

Hornet may have him set up for the finisher."

"He's calling for the microphone, Ross. I think we're finally going to hear the Charlotte Hornet speak!"

"Now... we go... to school"

"As you can see, fans, the Hornet has clamped on the figure-four leglock, and he has it smack in the middle of the ring. This could be the end of the Black Olive's career!"

"You'll have to speak up, Ross. I can't hear a word you're saying. These goofy fans are screaming so loud, I can't even hear myself."

"I don't know how much more punishment the Olive is going to be able to stand. The official has the mic down there, but it may be difficult to hear anything over this crowd."

"Auggh... Auggh... I... I.... QUIT!"

"That's it, Paul! The Black Olive is a beaten man! Doug Dillinger handcuffs the Olive to the ropes to prevent a premature escape to the locker room area. Let's go up to Gary Capetta for the official announcement."

"Ladies and gentlemen"... (the Hornet begins unlacing his mask, and long, blonde locks appear from underneath)... "the winner of the match"... (the mask is now completely off, revealing the original, very familiar hairstyle)... "Nature Boy, Ric Flaaaaaiiiirrrr!" (the old '2001' theme mysteriously erupts; the fans are by now practically foaming at the mouth.)

"Thank you, thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen." (Flair holds up a hand, and the crowd immediately turns

silent.) "Space Mountain... Whooooo!... is back in business! Speaking of which, gives me great pleasure to now show you the man who is completely out of the business." (When the Black Olive's mas comes off, the crowd is once again driven into a frenzy.)

"Oh my god, Jim, that's Mr. Herd!"

"Well, at least you're half right this time, Paul. But it's not 'Mr. Herd' anymore. Now it's just Jim 'Don't Let the Door at the CNN Centre Hit You in Your Big Rear End on the Way Out' Herd. And I think I can honestly say that this may be the greatest day in the history of WCW. Let's go back up to the Nature Boy."

"All right, little man, before you 'craw that aisle' back to oblivion, there's something myself and all these tremendous Greensboro fans would like to say. WE... HAVE... (the entire crowd is now screaming in unison) HERD... ENOUGH!"

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

"Okay, Paul, get back in your seat. What's so hilarious?"

"You missed it, Ross. That geek with the 'Section D' sign just tried to jump out of his chair and high-five 'Mr. Cardboard Championship Belt'. When he came down, he landed on the guard rail in a rather unique manner and now he's writing around on the floor."

"Yes, so I see. I just wonder if those are tears of joy streaming down his cheeks. At any rate, before we go off the air, we need to go up to Missy Hyatt in the ring with the Nature Boy for some final comments."

"Um, Ric, can we expect to see more of the old Nature Boy that we all loved so much?"

"It's back to stylin' and profilin'. I'm kiss stealin', wheelin' dealin', jet flyin', lim ridin' son of a gun! From now on, I'm sixty minute man, or if need be, *all night long!* Oh, watch out, honey. I'm sorry for sweatin' on you. It's been that kind of night hasn't it."

"Tee hee. Oh, that's okay. Just on more question. Um... about that Space Mountain thing."

"Sweetheart, why don't we finish this interview in the back."

"Well, fans, that's all the time we have. Jim Ross for Paul, Gordon, and Missy saying 'good night, everybody.'"

["The Specific Marc" is the long lost brother of frequent Torch contributor Random Marc. Actually, the author is unknown since the Torch editor lost his or her name.]

TORCH YEARBOOK

EXCLUSIVE:

THE ORIGINAL PLANS FOR THE SUMMERSLAM WEDDING OF MISS ELIZABETH AND RANDY SAVAGE

An Inside Source At WWF Leaks
Original Script for Wedding

By Torch Secret Agent, Ken Knisely

Foreward by Editor Wade Keller: At about the time the WWF was promoting SummerSlam, the steroid issue was rising to levels the WWF never thought possible. Just a few weeks earlier they had publicly announced a new steroid testing policy. At the same time, SummerSlam was headlined with the wedding of Randy Savage and Elizabeth. It seemed to strange to followers of the WWF that the wedding took place without any controversy. Just a few short weeks ago, Torch Secret Agent, Ken Knisely, came forward with a certified transcript of what a WWF source supplied him, understanding it would be printed in the Torch upon receipt. This source has become very fed up with the WWF's steroid policy and their pompous attitude toward the controversy, thus felt it would help complete the picture to show what the WWF and namely Vince McMahon originally planned to do at the SummerSlam wedding and how they were tentatively going to follow up on those plans. This inside source submitted a 25 page typed document which has been reprinted exclusively in the *Torch*. Upon the urging of less pompous heads in the WWF, Vince McMahon, only hours before SummerSlam, scrapped the plans and decided to instead conduct the wedding ceremony without controversy. Part of the reason the plans were scrapped was also the realization that the signing of Ric Flair was imminent. Now, onto the transcript of the previously secret document which reveals how McMahon planned to exploit the steroid issue to make money...

WWF TOP SECRET DOCUMENT:
Script for SummerSlam and
tentative follow up angles
leading to Wrestlemania...

Summerslam, August 26th,
Madison Square Garden, as Macho
Man and Miss Elizabeth are about
to take their vows, Vince McMahon
receives a telegram and a small
brown bag at the announcers'

table. Vince acts surprised, and quickly leaves the table and runs down to the ring. As the Macho couple are about to say, "I do", Vince enters the ring and interrupts the ceremony.

Elizabeth looks confused, and Macho Man acts perturbed. Vince grabs the house mic and begins:

"Fans, as I'm sure you already know, as a responsible leader in sports entertainment, the World Wrestling Federation, since 1987, has had the most comprehensive and well-enforced drug program in all of professional sports. Now, the WWF program has been expanded to include the most respected independent outside experts, a program for steroid testing, education, and rehabilitation. Since this policy is innovative, as well as comprehensive, not only have all WWF wrestlers been tested, but all relatives of WWF wrestlers have been tested. This innovative policy will ensure that our wrestlers, as well as their relatives, adhere to our high standards in order to preserve their places in the

world as worthy role models."

Macho Man proceeds to get into Vince McMahon's face, and stares at him for a very tense ten seconds. Vince does not back down, and stares back at the Macho Man. Macho Man then quickly grabs the mic from Vince and walks around the ring for a few seconds. He begins to speak:

"Ohhhh yeah. Vince McMahon, you come down into the ring and interrupt the most important day in my life. Vince, you seem to be implying something terrible here. If you were a real man, you would just come out and say it."

Macho throws the mic down in anger and takes several steps backward. Vince stares at Macho Man for a few seconds and picks up the mic.

"Okay, Macho Man, if that's the way you want it," says Vince. Vince looks at the telegram for a few seconds, then addresses the audience.

"According to our reputable, independent testing laboratory, we have our first test failure. It is with deep regrets that I must inform the fans that Miss Elizabeth has failed her test, and as such, I cannot allow this wedding to continue." Vince steps back as the Macho Man rushes him. Macho is restrained by the referee and Vince continues.

"Behind the fair-minded person that I am, and considering that our policy includes education and rehabilitation, I am willing to give Miss Elizabeth a second chance. Keeping in mind that only the greatest role models in the history of sports entertainment are employed by the WWF, and because the WWF stands for good wholesome family entertainment, I feel that it is necessary to conduct this test as soon as possible, right here in the ring. So, without further delay..."

Vince reaches into the brown paper bag and pulls out a small plastic cup. "Miss Elizabeth, please lift your wedding gown and urinate into the cup," says Vince.

Well, nothing short of the New York National Guard can keep the Macho Man off of Vince McMahon. Macho Man quickly pounds Vince into the mat. He then introduces Vince's face to the wedding cake. For good measure, Macho Man gives Vince an elbow off of the top rope. As this is occurring, the wedding guests and officials

scatter, some running to the locker room in search of help. Macho finishes by kicking Vince to the floor, and then grabs the mic.

"Ohhhh yeah!," said Macho Man. "Vince McMahon, you lying Connecticut scum. How dare you come out here and make disparaging remarks about the Macho Bride. How dare you attempt to intimidate and humiliate my wife in front of millions. She has never taken so much as an aspirin in her life, let alone what you've insinuated. Oh yeah, Vince McMahon, look what the madness has done to you. Vince, let me ask you this: Whose picture was taken with the Doctor? Who was supposed to appear at the trial, but didn't? Who got to the judge? Oh yeah, Vince, it's time that the millions of fans knew the truth, you..."

Music begins to blare. Thousands of fans stand, wildly cheering as none other than Hulk Hogan and the Ultimate Warrior race to the ring. (We will be sure Hellwig has been working out on the stairmaster so he won't blow-up during this event or he will be fired after the event. We have simply had enough from this character and will not put up with much more.) Macho Man quickly exits the ring and watches from the floor as Hulk begins to speak.

"Since the beginning, there have been three men who have ruled the world," says Hogan. (In the fine tradition of pro wrestling and sports entertainment, the short reigns of the Iron Sheik and Sgt. Slaughter shall be forgotten, since they do not serve our purposes here, and, as everyone knows; everyone remember, the world did not begin until 1984). In the eyes of the world, these three have been equals. Remember, Macho Man? Remember when we were the Megapowers, together the two most powerful forces in the world? Remember when we watched each other's back? Remember when we were inseparable? Remember when we were equals?

"Well, Macho Man, appearances can be deceiving. I alone knew why you appeared to be my equal. I rose to the top of the WWF due

to exercise, prayers, and vitamins. But you, Macho Man, took shortcuts. Illegal and potentially deadly shortcuts. Yes, Macho Man, it's time that the world knew the truth about you. You, Macho Man..."

Once again, the crowd begins to cheer and scream wildly. The Hulkster and the Warrior turn around just in time to take twin chair shots from none other than Mr. Perfect and the Million Dollar Man. As our two heroes lay unconscious in the ring, Macho Man reenters and celebrates with his two compatriots. Macho Man once again grabs the microphone.

"Oh yeah, Hulkster, Ultimate Warrior!" says Macho Man. "Which



THE WEDDING OF MACHO MAN AND ELIZABETH: ORIGINALLY WAS NOT GOING TO BE AS SMOOTH AS IT TURNED OUT

three rule the world now? The Macho Man has no need to hide further. Yes, I took steroids; so what? You can't stop me. Vince can't stop me. The pukemaniacs can't stop me. No one can stop me. Come, Elizabeth."

(Once again, Macho Man was never accused of taking steroids. Elizabeth was. But since when did we respect our customers enough to make our angles make sense.)

Mr. Perfect and the Million Dollar Man hold the ropes open for the royal couple. Then they carry Macho Man on their shoulders and take him back to the heel dressing room.

Throughout the remainder of the show, the announcers sell this angle. They also wonder whether the "Real Megapowers", as the new team of the Hulkster and the Ultimate Warrior will come to be called, can overcome all of this adversity and still defeat the Iraqi Trio. The Real Megapowers enter the main event with their bloody heads heavily bandaged. The match turns into a

five minute squash and, as expected, the Iraqis lose. While the duo overcame three-on-two odds after such a brutal attack, the fans are left wondering whether they can do it again against these new villains.

The next week, on Superstars of Wrestling, Jack Tunney formally suspends the Macho man. The week after that, on Prime Time Wrestling, Mr. Perfect, who is to lose the Intercontinental belt to Bret Hart at SummerSlam and the Million Dollar Man, run in on a Koko B. Ware squash and stretcher him out. This act earns them a suspension also. Of course, Hulk pleads with Jack Tunney to reinstate the trio, and of course, they indeed are reinstated. The feud between these five, in different permutations, extends to Wrestlemania VIII, where the Hulkster battles the Macho Man in a "Loser Admits to Using Steroids" match. And we all know who wins this match.

After Wrestlemania, it is revealed that the entire feud was set up by the Million Dollar Man, who originally substituted Sensational Sherri's urine for Elizabeth's. This action on his part caused

the break-up of the wedding at SummerSlam, and he didn't have to do it himself, and he didn't receive most of the blame. After this revelation, Macho Man feuds with the Million Dollar Man until SummerSlam '92 when...

In the meantime, we are viewed as booking geniuses. In addition to reviving several stale acts and creating heat for a main event that would have had none, we use a topical situation to create a long-term feud, and in doing so, diffuse bad publicity away from the Hulk and our organization, and put the heat on the heels. The irony of all this is lost on the general populous of fans. And perhaps most importantly, we will make gobs of money so we can... (censored so as not to offend the sensibilities of Chris Cruise). All of this could be altered pending further negotiations with Mr. Flair.

[In case you haven't figured it out yet there really was not a secret document, but thanks for playing along. Ken Knisely is Torch Subscriber from Houston, Tex.]

BACK TO THE TERRITORIES

IN 1992, THE NEED IS GREATER THAN EVER FOR THE MAJOR LEAGUES TO SUPPORT THE REGIONAL PROMOTIONS

By Jeff Cohen

In the year 1982, a wrestler burned out in Portland could make a decent living moving to Oklahoma, or to Dallas, or to Atlanta, Florida, New York, Puerto Rico, and so on. In the year 1992, a burned out wrestler works independent cards. He hopes he can book some work in Japan. In the meantime, he takes his vitamins and prays for a phone call from the World Wrestling Federation or World Championship Wrestling.

Hardcore grappling fans yearn for new faces, shining talents, yet there is nowhere for these rookies to learn their trade. Calgary has dried up. Memphis is full of relics. Portland is a ghost town. Where will the superstars of the 90s come from?

Television is blamed for the demise of territorial wrestling. Overkill and oversaturation. Overbooking and running meaningless angles week after week until no casual fan cares anymore. Pushing the same few faces and heels year after year in recycled feuds, running the same matches on top at house cards month after month. Is there a solution, when local stations are dropping wrestling programs at an alarming rate?

Don Owen has lost his TV slot. Canadian wrestling is dead. The Florida independent scene thrives, but attendance runs in the 100 to 300 range week to week. The badly-produced, rerun-driven International World Class Championship Wrestling manages to hold a timeslot on SportsChannel. What has gone so wrong in wrestling? And can it ever be brought back into check?

The time is right for one of the two major promotions to try something drastic. What I am proposing is a modest return to the territorial spirit, with some important differences.

For the sake of argument, take WCW as the experimenting promotion and Portland Pro Wrestling as the guinea pig territory. All wrestlers working in the territory will have to sign contracts stipulating that they will work exclusively for that area and WCW, and that if they are made any competitive offer from another promotion,

WCW is allowed seven days to come up with a matching bid or loses that athlete. Because this proposal foresees WCW supervising 15 to 20 local territories, offers from competing regional offices need not be included, unless those offices have explicit or complicit deals with Titan or a Japanese organization.

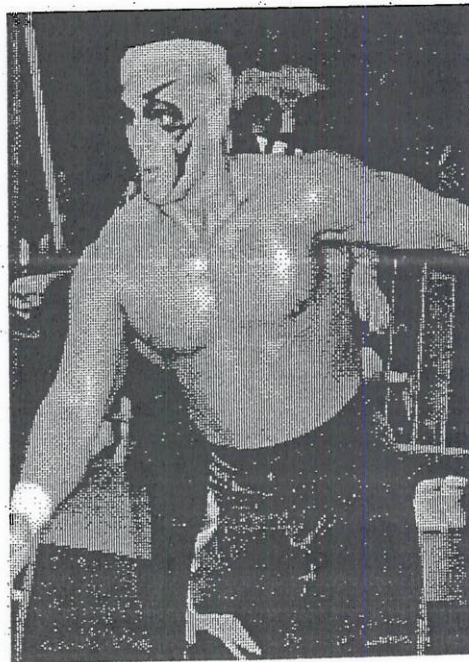
WCW either sends or contracts with the regional front office - in this case, Don Owen Promotions - to tape weekly cards at the Portland Sports Arena. Interviews and angles will be shot at these shows. They are edited locally and cleared by a WCW official within the week, so that they may air as soon as possible, comparable to the way Owen

previously ran the promotion. The footage should not exceed 30 minutes. This segment will run as the second half of the WCW syndicated program which runs in that area. Since WCW house shows are not doing the best business when they have four hours on TBS, plus one to two hours locally, the loss of 30 minutes in those territories would not be that much of a detriment.

Portland will then have 30 minutes of local broadcast to sell its weekly big show as well as any spot shows. Green talent is allowed to develop, and when veterans are burned out, they can be shipped off to another territory where WCW has made a similar deal. In this arrangement, more wrestlers will be able to make a living, and WCW will not have to worry about releasing talent into Titan's grasp.

Other benefits abound in setting up this arrangement. WCW can send two to three of its undercard performers who are not working major feuds on a territorial circuit, winning, defending, or feuding over regional titles. Their appearances theoretically will pump up houses moderately. P.N. News may never draw 15,000 fans at the Omni, but he may be good for 200 more fans in Portland on any given week, fighting Buddy Rose in a headline match for a regional title.

This will also allow beginners to learn many styles, see how gimmick matches really work, and learn to take pinfalls without believing they are destroying their careers. It has been estimated that there are perhaps one-quarter to one-fifth the wrestlers making a living in this country now compared to 1982 numbers. Bringing back a modified territorial scheme would revive some of those jobs, and make pro wrestling a viable career



STING, A WORLD CHAMPION TRAVELLING FROM TERRITORY TO TERRITORY?

choice for people other than bouncers and bodybuilders.

Through a territorial setup, Portland

could bring back a ladies champion and a lightheavyweight champion. Opponents could be important from different regions, including, but not limited to Japan. Jushin Liger could go on a tour of 20 regional areas, filling smaller venues to headline against smaller challengers. The best of these men would get the chance to show off their stuff, plus impress the overseas offices and help the foreign exchange of talent. Japan will suffer a similar void when they realize that the number of attractive Americans to import is dwindling. Instead of Tony Halme or Scott Norton, they could



SCOTT NORTON

bring in somewhat seasoned youngsters who would not embarrass the natives who have put them over. Better yet, with this proposal in motion, a Scott Norton would have another 15 to 18 areas to work and cultivate his craft before getting a big Japanese push.

A world champion, say Sting, could go into a city where WCW has typically been drawing weak cards, working on top against Portland's top heel. WCW would save on travelling expenses by sending only a dozen or so of its workers. The rest would be working a split bill on the other side of the continent, with the U.S. Champion, say Ricky Steamboat, defending against the heel regional champ of Calgary.

Since WCW has so many titles, rendering them virtually worthless, one or more could be put to work throughout the territories. The six-man titles, as an example. Three men enter Portland from WCW with the belts, drop them a week or two into a program with some locals, and

then they depart. After a few months, three men from either WCW or another territory enter to run a new series of matches and the local trio drop the belts to them. In this way, Portland has wrestlers defending "important" WCW titles regionally, giving those performers a push and adding credibility to the area's own beltholders. Winning and losing belts would happen on a more frequent basis, stressing personality and ability over invulnerability. Doing jobs would become part of the routine, and not as damaging to anyone's career.

This was how the business was run twenty years ago. With WCW arranging a territorial network and contracting services through a central office, this would open up hundreds of jobs for veterans and up-and-coming talents.

What would this cost WCW? Half an hour of television in those cities. At the start, I imagine WCW would experiment in cities where their TV runs at no cost for them. The exchange would pay off as soon as a promising youngster began having exciting matches. WCW immediately would send in one of its veterans to have a series of bouts against the rookie to test their abilities. If everything panned out, the rookie would be farmed out to another region to see how they would handle new crowds and diverse challenges. Eventually, that performer could be offered a major contract, wrestling every month in arena shows and on the nationally-syndicated programs, while also fulfilling obligations on regional cards to advance their talents.

The central WCW office would need to hire at least one staff person to coordinate the new alliances and the production staff would need to manufacture a special half-hour syndicated program for each market where the regional program was in effect.

One direct aspect that could be addressed would be the nature of at least one pay-per-view event. The Crockett Memorial Cup could be brought back, as tag teams from each territory could compete. For some teams, this would be their first major exposure. Buy rates would accelerate in every area where a local team was sent a representative. Each region would have competitions to pick this top team. With the need for new faces and clean finishes, this would provide a wealth of resources.

Portland could only benefit. Don Owen needs a TV outlet. WCW needs new talent. One half-hour show is a slim price to



VAN HAMMER: NEEDS A PLACE TO DEVELOP HIS SKILLS?

sacrifice. The end returns could be immense. The WWF would likely rather stick to raiding other promotions than cultivate their own regional promotion.

Why not hook up with a Minnesota independent group and help them possibly flourish? Eventually it could serve to revitalize a national spirit and bring meaning back to a world champion who actually defended around the territories against numerous opponents, instead of the same two or three guys per year.

Women and lightheavyweights would also profit to an even greater extent, as their ranks are slimmer. People complain that there are few good women and smaller bodies in the ring. A regional outlook might replenish those parched waters.

The time has come and the business will only spiral downward if things continue in this manner much longer. WCW, if they see fit, must loosely bind themselves to the still-existing independents in Philly, Calgary, Tampa, Detroit, Dallas, Minneapolis, Portland, and wherever else there is a glimmer of hope. If grappling does not evolve, it could soon cease travelling to local venues. There is an undiscovered country, as Shakespeare wrote. Wrestling must strive to find it or the rest is darkness.

[Jeff Cohen is editor of a wrestling fanzine called "Fantasy Federation," which features his and other fans' write-ups on imaginary dream matches and an editorial from Cohen. "Fantasy Federation" is available for \$1.00 from 50 Shelley Lane, Greenvale, N.Y. 11023]

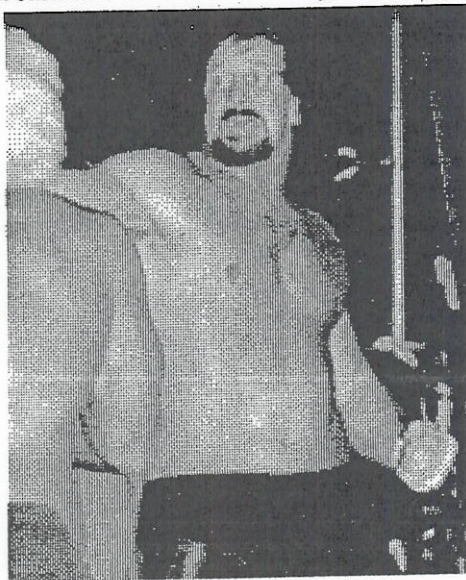
1991: The Year the World Title Was Counted Out

BY: TIM WHITEHEAD

Southeastern Championship Wrestling was a small promotion based in East Tennessee in the late 70s and early 80s. It was typical of the regional circuits that epitomized the American wrestling scene for so long, with a regular schedule of stops in East Tennessee and Southeast Kentucky. Like every similar territory, it had its own array of babyfaces and heels, with the Fullers, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Armstrong, Dick Slater, the Mongolian Stomper, and Bob Orton among those dominating the area. Les Thatcher and Phil Rainey provided commentary and the program was always exciting even though it was broadcast from a small TV studio in Knoxville. SCW was a member of the NWA, and the old federation logo (which back then stood for something) was always displayed prominently during broadcasts.

SCW booked an assortment of cage matches, grudge matches, Texas death matches, and other violent confrontations, but nothing was more exciting than when the NWA world champion came to town. One of my fondest memories of SCW was when reigning champ Terry Funk came to Knoxville to defend against Southeastern champ, Ron Fuller. In those days of regional wrestling, the common practice was to air a video clip of the world champion pinning several challengers to build up his status prior to his arrival. They would also conduct a studio interview with the local challenger and juxtapose it with a taped interview with the champ. The Funk vs. Fuller match was no exception. They aired a vintage Funk tirade, said to have been taped at the Funk family ranch outside Amarillo, in which the champ blasted the good citizens of East Tennessee and indicated that if it were up to him he would hang Rob Fuller from the tallest tree in Texas. But since the law no longer permitted lynching, Funk vowed to do the next best thing, namely, come to Knoxville and beat the crap out of the "Tennessee Stud". The heat was incredible!

The greatest asset a federation has is its world championship. There was once a



TERRY FUNK: A REAL WORLD CHAMPION

time when a world title defense meant something. Even an ordinary title defense against the champion of a small territory such as SCW was a big event, selling out the arena and creating a special atmosphere among the fans. But today, a world title defense rarely means anything, and 1991 may have been the worst year in the history of pro wrestling for the concept of a world championship. In the past (and it now seems so long ago) the NWA world

champion would travel from region to region, defending his belt against the local champion. Gordon Solie used to say that the world champion's travel schedule alone would be enough to destroy most men. And that travel led to a different opponent every night in Mid-Atlantic, Pacific Northwest, Central States, or any of a number of local circuits, not to mention occasional tours overseas.

In 1991, with the regional circuits effectively extinct, the federation champion almost never defended his belt outside the auspices of the overall governing body. The travel is still there today, but that travel leads to the same opponent, night after night, arena after arena. Indeed, it is not uncommon for today's world champions to defend against the same opponent for months, particularly in the WWF. The ridiculously long Hogan vs. Slaughter series of 1991 is but one example. This series would have been way too long even if the matches had been good. (As it was, not only was this series too long, it was too wide and too deep as well). The Hulkster followed up the Slaughter snorefest with a few bouts against the Warlord before taking two months off to promote "Suburban Commando" (which was sort of like a movie, but nowhere near as good) in violation of the thirty day rule, which was once sacrosanct. I guess Hogan, being "immortal", isn't subject to the rules which apply to mortal wrestlers. He could probably even take steroids without suffering side effects.

To their credit WCW provided more world title challengers in 1991 than did McMahon, but they also had their share of sub-duds. Bill Kazmaier, who arguably does not even belong in the ring, got a world title shot in the vaunted Greensboro Coliseum, for heaven's sake! The El Gigante series against then-champ Ric Flair in early '91 was an insult to the entire sport. You can't possibly view Gigante as a viable contender if you're both honest and intelligent - you could if you were either one, but not both together. The only move Gigante knows is to say, "I want da' belt," and he could stand to do some work on the one.

It is difficult to recall a year in which there were fewer quality world title matches, or in which the two recognize world belts were treated with such disrespect, than 1991. There were really no title matches that could be considere

outstanding. There were some that were very good, most notably the Flair vs. Fujinami bouts at SuperBrawl and the Egg Dome. Some of the Flair vs. Hogan series have also been pretty good. But we're talking about a world title here. By their very nature, these bouts should carry enormous heat and should be of above average quality as a general rule. We can't reasonably expect every battle over a world belt to be four-stars or better, but we should expect at least a pretty good percentage of them to fall into that range.

Besides the mediocre-to-poor quality of many of 1991's title matches, several events occurred which have taken the status of the two big federation belts to all-time lows. WCW put their vacant title up for grabs in a Lex Luger vs. Barry Windham bout at the Baltimore Bash on July 14th. Without getting into the issue of the stupidity of losing Flair in the first place, this was the second worst possible way to fill the title. At the very least a tournament would have put Luger over as the dominant wrestler in the promotion. By pinning a man who has never held a world singles belt of any kind, Luger doomed the title to disrespect, even though his defenses have on the whole been superior to Hogan's. To countless fans, Flair remained the real world champion because he was never pinned for the title. But what does it say about Flair's title status when he appeared on WWF TV with his jewel-embazoned prize and it was treated like a joke by the entire federation? That belt, once a symbol of honor and pride, was spat upon, dropped on the floor, and ridiculed as just so much garbage before ultimately being digitized out of existence. McMahon's treatment of Flair's belt was nothing short of a disgrace.

The WWF belt took a blow early in the year when Vince gave the title to Sgt. Slaughter in a disgusting effort to get cheap heat off the Gulf War. The title then sunk still lower when it was held up following the "Tuesday in Texas" card in San Antonio. The Hogan vs. Undertaker bouts which set up this fiasco were bad enough, but when Jack Tunney (Vince McMahon's wind-up toy) announced that the title would be up for grabs in the Royal Rumble battle royal, it set a new low in promotional irresponsibility (actually, it tied the established low since the AWA did something like this a few years ago). Given the element of random chance in the

Rumble concept, what kind of message is being conveyed about the value of the WWF belt? True, a great wrestler, Ric Flair, won the belt in the end, but he did so without pinning anyone. At least Luger pinned Windham.



SGT. SLAUGHTER: 1991 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CALLIBRE TALENT?

In recent decades, there have been two general methods of booking world champions: The WWF model and the NWA model. Both proved successful when handled properly. In the WWF model, the entire promotion is built around a thoroughly dominant babyface champion. Heel title reigns are usually short transitional reigns between babyface dynasties, a la Ivan Koloff or the Iron Sheik. Vince McMahon Sr. proved that this simple morality play could pack the arena if the champ was someone the fans could relate to. Bruno Sammartino drew big as an ethnic, working class hero when the WWF (then the WWWF) was confined to the heavily ethnic, blue collar strongholds of the Northeast. Bob Backlund drew big as an average guy, sort of a prototypical boy next door. But who can relate to a cartoon character like Hulk Hogan? Kids can, that's for sure, but what about the adult hardcores? A superhero character like Hulk Hogan can draw big in the short term, but eventually the act wears thin, especially when the guy's matches are the same every time he wrestles. Nor does Hogan have the commitment to the sport to even try much anymore. During Bruno Sammartino's reigns, he defended the title every month in

Madison Square Garden, as well as appearing regularly in all of the WWF cities on the east coast. In contracts, Hogan works weekends between Hollywood stints.

The long range problem the Hulkster's reign has caused is to reverse the age ratio among wrestling fans. Most of today's hardcores became fans as children, or at least teenagers, in an era when pro wrestling was aimed primarily at adults. They may have been introduced to the sport by parents or by adults, and children - who naturally want to do adult things - grew into adult wrestling fans. In fact, some arenas, including Madison Square Garden, once barred pre-teens from attending live wrestling events.

But, the Hulksters title reigns have been promoted primarily toward children, as has the entire federation. By turning wrestling into a kiddie show, Vince Jr. has set in motion a process which has ominous implications for the future of the wrestling business. If the sport becomes seen as children's entertainment, kids will grow out of it instead of growing into it. They'll discard wrestling at puberty and move on to more adult oriented things. The steady decline in attendance at Hogan's world title main events (which was resurrected only temporarily by Ric Flair late in the year) is directly attributable to the loss of adult fans. In a desperate attempt to rebuild house show turnout, McMahon has produced numerous hardcore angles, from snake biting to snake squashing, to cover up the fact that his world championship has become so devalued that it couldn't draw in '91. Considering the general content of Titan shows, these angles looked like an ax murderer on "Captain Kangaroo".

The NWA model for promoting the world championship has traditionally been less one-dimensional than the WWF's method. Until recent years, the NWA world champion defended his belt against both heel and babyface challengers, which added intense heat, prestige, and credibility to the title. That's why it is so sad to see what has become of the belt. The re-named WCW belt has lost its unique sense of history, a link to the past which stretched back to the nineteenth century. Anxious to emulate the WWF's kiddie appeal, WCW officials have discarded the past almost as vociferously as the WWF bosses (whose rewriting of history brings new meaning to the term "Orwellian"). No longer does this belt

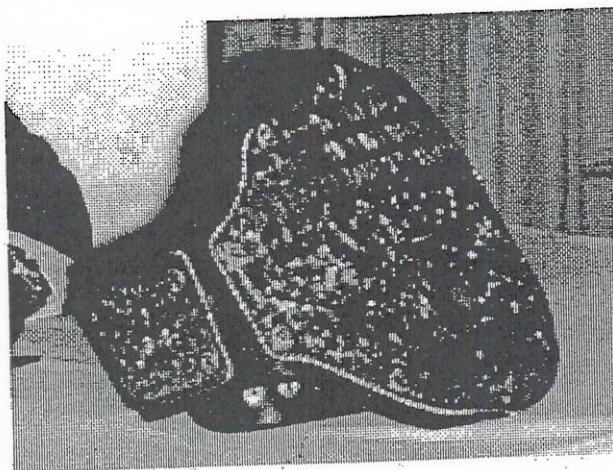
conjure images of Lou Thesz travelling the world in search of competition. No longer does it invoke the image of Harley Race, going from territory to territory, taking on the best area wrestlers. No longer does it remind us of the heat Flair could generate with a single "Whoooo!" Instead, the WCW belt is sterile and generic. It's simply difficult to get excited about.

In his early years as NWA champ, Ric Flair was a top draw because he's one of those few wrestlers who can build heat either as a face or as a heel. Unfortunately, the Dusty finishes, the disqualifications, the constant begging and selling, combined with repeatedly putting others of less talent over, gradually undermined the Flair mystique. By 1990, the "Nature Boy" was doing jobs for Junkyard Dog and wearing a Black Scorpion suit. By 1991, there was little in the way of prestige attached to the NWA belt, and the name change to WCW erased even the symbolic link to the past.

So what can be done to turn things around? First, promoters need to understand that there is absolutely no substitute for a viable world champion as a drawing card. Gimmick matches are fine as an added attraction, but they burn out really fast. Tag team titles are a great secondary



HARLEY RACE: FORMER NWA CHAMPION



THE NWA BELT: WHAT DOES IT STAND FOR?

draw, but the fans will never see them as equal in prestige to singles belts. Even in Mexico, where tag team bouts (including six and eight man matches) are extremely popular, one of their functions is to set up singles feuds between champions and challengers. Rebuilding the prestige of the world singles titles is a necessary prerequisite to restoring wrestling to financial health.

It will not be easy. The advent of cable television has made it more difficult than ever to find fresh title contenders. In the old regional days, wrestlers who had burned out in one territory could go to another and get a fresh start. He was new to the fans in that arena because he had not been seen repeatedly on television. In the NWA particularly, the world champion was a traveler. As such, he was not seen continuously on local TV or at the local arena. It was always a big deal when he came to town. Promoters need to recognize that overexposure of anything can lead to its devaluation.

Given the current situation of national promotions and TV saturation, it would seem that the best route would be to form co-operative arrangements with foreign promotions. Not just once or twice per year deals, but on-going working partnerships. Many foreign organizations are loaded with outstanding wrestlers, most of whom the average American fan knows little or nothing about. The WWF and WCW already have working relationships with SWS and New Japan respectively. Why not work these associations to their best advantage by bringing the best Japanese wrestler over to the U.S. to feud with the world champion? And why not bring All Japan, FMW, and other Japanese promotions into the mix? Jumbo Tsuruta

and Hiroshi Hase would certainly make better foes than Kazmaier, Warlord, or Gigante.

Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Otto Wanz' Catch Wrestling Association in Europe should also participate. After all, if a belt is a true world title, it should be defended throughout the world. Seeing all these new foreign wrestlers would be confusing to the fans at first, but eventually they would become educated to a new, more exciting brand of competition. Let the foreign wrestlers win the world title on occasion and then take the belt back to their homeland.

Show clips of the overseas title defenses during these times. This would establish the foreign wrestler as a world calibre wrestler while simultaneously keeping the image of the belt alive in the fans' minds. By the time the belt returned to America, tremendous heat and prestige would be attached to it, and house show ticket sales would revive.

Another good move would be for the big groups to work with the small independent promotions. These indie groups remain the best vehicle for training young wrestlers. Instead of viewing them as competition, the majors should form arrangements for talent swaps and co-promotional ventures. Some writers have even suggested that the big federations should subsidize the small groups, like a farm system. If properly handled, such a farm system would work to the advantage of both groups.

Despite its recent problems, WCW remains the best hope for those of us who long for a revival of exciting, competitive wrestling. The current WCW roster contains plenty of talent if it's only promoted properly. Their link with New Japan has awesome potential, and the bonu in Atlanta should play it for all it's worth. Let Vince Jr. blot out the past if he choose WCW can show the world that they are the federation with the *true* world's champion while Vince can sell his ice cream bars and promote his watered-down "sports entertainment" (this term sounds so lar because it's difficult to make a good case for stupidity).

The world title got counted out in 1991. Let 1992 be the year it scores a clean pin.

[Tim Whitehead is a wrestling fan and a Wrestling Torch reader from Johnson C Tenn.]

"NEXT WEDNESDAY IN WISCONSIN"

**AN EXCITING EXCLUSIVE TRANSCRIPT
OF THE TOP SECRET ENCORE PAY-PER-VIEW
TO "THIS TUESDAY IN TEXAS"**

By Mark Madden

Spurred on by the artistic success of the WWF's December 13, 1991 pay-per-view, "This Tuesday in Texa", the WWF shot another low-budget pay-per-view called "Next Wednesday in Wisconsin" shortly after the turn of the new year. This PPV, however, wasn't aired live. It was taped and its release held pending the financial success of TTT (note subliminal message in the acronym - Vince thinks of everything). When the buyrate for TTT turned out to not even net enough to pay the WWF's Fed-Ex bills for a month, however, the second mini-PPV was scrapped and all copies of the tape destroyed.

Pro Wrestling Torch, however, received an audio copy of the tape for NWiW after paying a member of the WWF front office with teenage girls - that's right, girls, which certainly narrows down who it could be - after a recent TV taping. The shocking transcript (along with the described visual proceedings of NWiW is presented forthwith:

(Opening shot is of Gorilla Monsoon and Jim Cornette sitting in a high school gym with a wrestling ring sitting in its middle. The crowd consists of about 225 people with at least half of those looking like homeless folks who wandered in out of the cold and the other half looking still worse - i.e., dressed like Pat Patterson. Monsoon opens as Cornette, also dressed like Pat Patterson, is caught in mid-yawn).

MONSOON: Hello and welcome once again to the finest in sports entertainment with the World Wrestling Federation. Tonight we will be privileged to witness what is undoubtedly the top event in not only the history of the WWF, but in the history of wrestling - no, in the history of organized athletics - no, in the history of organized crime - no, in the history of history: Next Wednesday in Wisconsin, with three titles on the line tonight.

Joining me is a man who needs no introduction - well, come to think of it, he does need an introduction, since he's never been involved in wrestling before. He's the Kentucky Colonel, Jim Cornette.

Comments, Jim?

CORNETTE: I thought you'd never ask, Monsoon, and frankly, I thought you'd never shut up, either. It's a good thing the last couple years have me used to workin' in front of crowds this big or I'd be insulted. And as for this being a big event, it ranks right up there with virgin birth - which I'd say you were a product of, except I know your mama used to hang around the monkey cage at the zoo. I know what you people are thinkin' - what is Jim Cornette, bastion of the old NWA doing on a WWF telecast? (Monsoon, wide-eyed, makes shushing motions at Cornette.) What is Jim Cornette, former manager of Bobby Eaton and Stan Lane, twin sons of different mothers, the human highlight film of tag team wrestling, doing givin' credibility to a show where John Tenta may well turn out to be the best worker? (Monsoon shushes Cornette again.) Anyway, what is Jim Cornette doing on a telecast where the men are only men because their masculinity comes out of a needle and because they have more

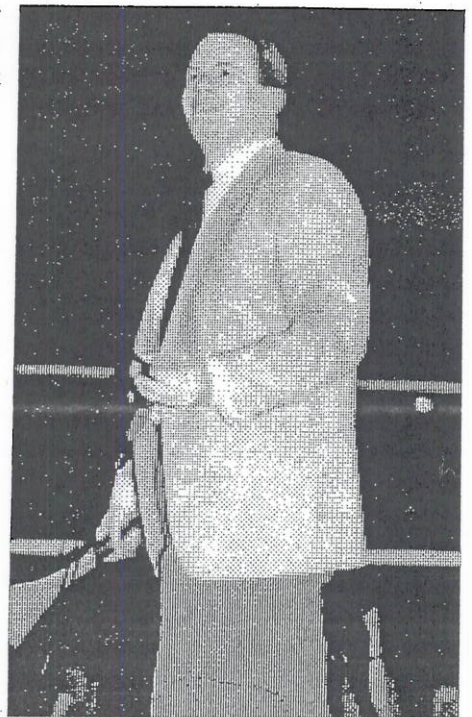
testosterone floatin' around in their system than Missy Hyatt does in her esophagus (Monsoon motions to the back.) Well, wha I'm doin' is fixin' to get thrown off it! Wh don't you idiots out there forget you eve saw this, forget you ever saw that cra they're doin' in Atlanta, and tune in t Smokey Mountain Wrestling, the next bi thing, where the men are *really* men, th women - well, you get what you pay for and the only one makin' any money is me the promoter. In other words, we'r returning to the glory days of pro wrestling We're currently on Channel 49 i Hicksville, Alabama on Channel...

(At this point, the screen blacks out, bu a thud is heard on the audio.)

MONSOON: A little technical glitch there, fans... joining me now is my colo man, that piece of garbage, Bobby Heenan

HEENAN: Thanks a lot, Monsoon, geez, I almost tripped over that... Hey, i that a body, or just Patterson's dressin dummy under the table here?

MONSOON: Never mind that, Brain



JIM CORNETTE

let's look at the matches we have in store for the fans tonight, featuring some of the WWF's finest athletes.

HEENAN: Let's see here, for starter we got Santana, who I guess managed to beat the border guards to get back here i



BARRY HOROWITZ

time for tonight, against... against *Barry Horowitz*? Barry Horowitz, can this be right? I thought he was still with that bunch that ESPN uses to lead into the tractor pulls. Then we have my man, the real world's champion, Ric Flair, with Mr. Perfect in his Cornette against the WWF's so-called champion, Hulk Hogan, with Dr. George T. Zahorian in his corner. (Looks off camera) Just a joke, Vince. Hell, we're not live. We can bleep it out later. Yeah, same as we did when Monsoon grilled me on Prime Time about OD'ing on that airplane, right? (Looks back on camera) Then we got Intercontinental champion, Bret Hart, assuming the lube job on his head's done by then, against... *Pez Whatley*? (Looks off camera again) Hey Vince, is this a pay-per-view or a Superstars taping? *Pez Whatley*. Geez, I thought he was dead. Hey, how 'bout we call him Shaska, spice things up a bit? (Silence) Yes, sir, right, sir, *Pez Whatley*. (Looks back on camera.) Yes, sir, *Pez Whatley*, a fine competitor, owned the Harlem TV title at one point... oh no, wait, he held the Harlem record for stealing the most TVs.

MONSOON: Now cut that out, you piece of garbage!

HEENAN: Oh no, nice one, Monsoon. Then we have for the WWF tag team titles, Hawk and Animal, the Legion of Dianabol, er, Doom, against... *Billy Anderson and Louie Spicoli*? Geez, the only chance this match has of being close is if Shults and Graham are backstage shootin' those two up with both fists right now! (Look off

camera.) Take it easy, take it easy! Geez, I'm gonna have fun if no one else watching this is. (Silence) Yes sir, not again, sir. (Looks back on camera) Anyway, it's going to be a great night. (Yawns) But, hey, Monsoon, I've gotta go talk to my man, the real world's champion, Ric Flair! (Bolts from chair.)

MONSOON: Hey, where's he going? But anyway, before we begin the festivities, we have a real hero with us... well, not as real as Hulk Hogan or Sid Justice, but real nonetheless. It's Chicago Bears fullback Brad Muster who saved 10 nuns and 36 orphans from a burning building in Chicago today.

(Muster sits down, on camera, next to Monsoon)

MUSTER: It's a pleasure to be here, Gorilla.

MONSOON: Well, Brad, let's talk a little bit about you. You play in the NFL, to me the second-most difficult form of athletic endeavor...

MUSTER: Behind wrestling. That's right sir...

MONSOON (losing composure): Behind WWF wrestling, you simpleton! Don't confuse the pubic! (Looks into the camera, regains composure) Anyway, the NFL's tough, but not as tough as racing into a burning building and rescuing all those people. I understand a few of those kids had burnt *latissimus borsis*!

MUSTER: (looking confused): Er, yeah, right. Well, it was no big deal. I just want to thank my offensive line, who played a big part...

MONSOON: Wait a minute, Brad! Your line wasn't even there today!

MUSTER: Well, no sir, but they could have been. The fire didn't know that. Just the thought of those guys possibly behind me there made the fire jump out of my way, I'm sure. And holy smokes (Brad pauses, grins in recognition of his pun)... and holy smokes, if Neal Anderson had been there, well, you know the flames were fleeing on the possibility of him showing up! It was easy for me.

MONSOON: Well, Brad, tell us about your background as a wrestling fan.

MUSTER (hesitates, then leans over and whispers): Hey, Gorilla, do I really have to say I hate Ric? I mean, I know that's

what I'm supposed to say, but he's sort of my hero, and a really good friend besides, and I just...

(The screen blacks out and another thump is heard.)

MONSOON: Well, we're back, and so is the Brain! What did your man say?

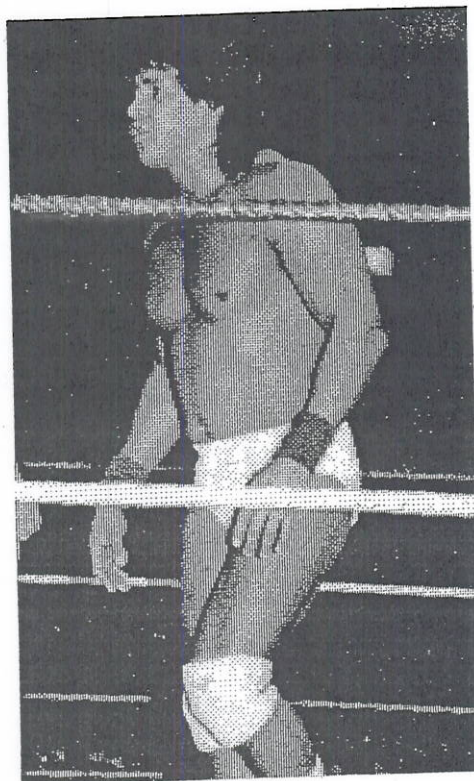
HEENAN (Grinning slyly at Monsoon): He said plenty, Gorilla.

(Monsoon seems more confused than normal, then carries on as Heenan whistles contentedly.)

MONSOON: Anyway, let's go to Mike McGuirk and our first match.

(McGuirk, sporting traces of a beard, a noticeable bulge in her pants, and huge biceps, grabs the mic after shoving a hypodermic in her back pocket and speaks in a voice ranging somewhere between bass and Don Cornelius.)

MCGUIRK: Already in the ring, from Job City, Texas, Barry "The Winner" Horowitz! (Horowitz pats himself on the back, then falls over from the impact of the blow. He gets up and stage-whispers, 'Geez, those guys Graham and Shults don't know when to quit! That'll teach me to wander into Hogan's dressing room!') And coming down the aisle, from Tijuana, Mexico, El Matador, Tito Santana! (Santana comes into the ring wearing a



TITO SANTANA

Taco Bell logo in the middle of his cape while handing out 39[CT] burrito coupons to youngsters.)

MONSOON (Thinking his mic is still off): Geez, Vince really did it! I thought he was kidding! Do we need money *that* bad? We're what? We're on?

(The match starts. Santana goes for an armdrag, but Horowitz rolls him up into a small package and wins in four seconds. Monsoon is stunned, Heenan is laughing.)

HEENAN: *Did you see that?!* That was the greatest thing I've ever seen! Horowitz folded that greaser up like a taco!

MONSOON: You wish, Brain! Never happened! A clean win for Santana!

CORNETTE (groggily from under the table) Barry, Barry, you were great! Come work for me in Mud Lick, Kentu...

(Screen blacks out. Another thump is heard.)

MONSOON: Now let's go to the dressing room for comments from the participants in our feature match, the so-called real world's champion, Ric Flair, who to my knowledge never even wrestled before coming to the WWF, and that bastion of Americana, Hulk Hogan!

(Flair and Curt Hennig appear on the screen)

FLAIR: Big man, I gotta tell you like this! There are two ways to wrestle: the easy way and the hard way! How do ya' wanna wrestle, big man? The easy way? Yeah, you're used to the easy way, aren't you? But tonight, it's the hard way! And whether it takes 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 60 minutes, or all night long... Hulk Hogan, *you're gonna be mine!* Whoooooo!

HENNIG (in a whisper): Hey, man, what are you doing. That's not what the cards over there said....

(Hogan appears on the screen. His speech is slurred as if he's in a funk - no offense, Terry - created by barbiturates. Hell, this is satire, let's just say he *is* in a funk created by barbiturates. He drools, gulps a handful of white tablets, and then faces the camera.)

HOGAN (barely audible): Hey, I wanna say something to my... to all my... too all my... I wanna say something to somebody, but I forget who and what I wanna say... Ric Flair... 28-inch pythons... whaddya mean, 24? Get Zahorian back in

here... Did you ever fly on an airplane? I like airplanes... Anyway, thank you all for coming.

(The camera goes back to a stunning Monsoon and a laughing Heenan.)

HEENAN: Well, I guess that about sums it up, eh, Monsoon?

MONSOON (barely audible): My God, I wonder... I can't believe... let's go to the ring for this historic matchup.

MCGUIRK (between winking at women in the front row): Coming down the aisle, accompanied by Mr. Perfect - the only man here whose forehead is bigger than mine, I might add - the real world's champion, Ric Flair! (Flair walks that aisle, with his old theme music, the theme from '2001: A Space Odyssey', playing. Heenan

says, 'Hey, that's not the right song...') And, now, the hero of kids everywhere and the man who showed me my new way of life... he's accompanied by that hot dish, Elizabeth... Hulk Hogan!

(Hogan, drooling and stumbling, has to be helped into the ring. McGuirk grabs Elizabeth and begins ripping her clothes off while dragging her back toward the dressing room for heaven knows what...)

HEENAN: Hey, how about that, Monsoon. Somebody in this company does like girls!

MONSOON: Now cut that out!

(Flair and Hogan meet in mid-ring. Flair stares him down. ...literally, as Hogan just falls lifelessly to the canvas. Flair puts him in the figure-four, but, after realizing Hogan is too stoned to submit, pins him LOD-style, pushing him down with two hands to the chest. Referee Earl Hebner, looking suspiciously like Tommy Young, counts the fall.)

MONSOON: Er, ah, I, ah, er... (the

WWF president, Jack Tunney, walks down the aisle toward the ring)... Ah, ha, Brain! There must have been some kind of shenanigans pulled, 'cause here comes Jack Tunney to set the record straight!

(Tunney gets halfway down the aisle, but a figure clad in karate pants steps from the shadows and drops him with a kick to the head.)

MONSOON: What in blue blazes...

HEENAN: Oh, Monsoon, how impolite of me. I didn't introduce you to the newest member of the Heenan family, Mr. Maeda. He's wrestled once or twice before, I believe. Should be a find addition to the stable... along with the *only world champion*, Ric Flair! (Maeda jumps in the ring and shoot-kicks Hennig in the head.) MONSOON: Ah, ah, er, ah...

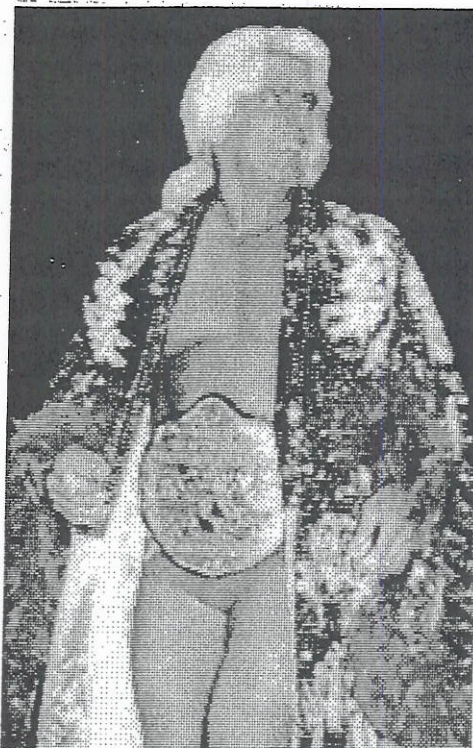
HEENAN: Well, so much for Mr. Perfect. It was nice while it lasted, but you can't trust anyone who ever worked for the Gagne family. Hell, I'm living proof of that.

MONSOON: Er, ah, er... (passes out on the table)

(Flair displays the WWF championship belt, then takes a leather bag from Maeda and takes from it the NWA/WCW championship belt. He displays both belts as he walks down the aisle. Nearly the entire WWF stable rushes Flair, but Maeda, now joined by Nobuhiko Takada, kicks them unconscious one by one. The last man rushing in is Sid Justice, brandishing a squeegee. Flair trips Justice with a drop toe-hold, then holds him while Maeda and Takada break every rib in his body. All the while Flair yells, 'Hey, Sid, how do you like your ribs?')

HEENAN (imitating Flounder in Animal House): Oh, boy, is this great! (Vince McMahon joins Heenan at the table)

MCMAHON: I don't think this is so



RIC FLAIR



BOBBY HEENAN & GORILLA MONSOON

great, Bobby Heenan! This is a travesty!

HEENAN: Geez, cut the crap, Junior, and watch the monitor! I think someone should be joining us any minute!

(In a scene that can be seen both at home and on McMahon's monitor, the screen splits. On the left side is a shocked McMahon; on the right side is a fuzzy silhouette that eventually comes into focus as Ted Turner.)

TURNER: So, I'm not the competition, huh, Vince? Well, maybe you didn't think so and, as far as the wrestling business was concerned, maybe I wasn't... until now, that is. You see, you're no competition for me in one key department... money. I bet you didn't even know you were for sale. But you were. And I bought you. *I own you, lock, stock, and barrel!* (Flair, but this time at the table with McMahon, screams 'Whooooo!' in his ear, then levels him with a thunderous chop. The screen stays split, with a prone McMahon on one side.) Ah, I see my associate, Mr. Flair, is there. How are you doing, Champ? I take it Mr. Heenan has decided to join us as well?

FLAIR: You bet, Ted. We couldn't have done it without him. Look at this Vince, I got your belt. I got the NWA belt... come to think of it (reaches in bag again), I got Crockett's old U.S. belt, the Mid-Atlantic TV title belt, the belt I won from Race...

(Monsoon stands up, his pants fall down, and so does he, again.)

FLAIR: ... and, oh yeah, I got Gorilla's belt, too!

MCMAHON: (struggling to his feet): This couldn't have happened! This couldn't have happened! It can't get any worse than this!

(At this point, two dozen men and women wearing FBI blazers and accompanied by Leslie Nielsen as Lt. Frank Drebin rush onto the scene and handcuff Vince. A voiceover by the same guy that does the Old Milwaukee commercials says, 'But then the FBI showed up to arrest Vince on racketeering charges, and things did get worse.' Drebin hits Vince in the face with a pie.)

DREBIN: Okay, McMahon, were you in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963?

AGENT (slapping Drebin): No, idiot, this is the steroid guy!

DREBIN: Oh, right, the steroid guy!

VOICEOVER: And then things would get considerably worse...

(A blurry figure appears next to Turner on his half of the screen and sputters, in righteous indignation, then speaks.)

SHADOWY FIGURE: Thith couldn't have hap-pened? Brotha' Vinnie, it wath bound to happen, if you thee what I'm thayin' to you. You worried about buildin' bodieth, about thellin' toyth, about ly-in to the public, but you forget about the wrethlin'. The wrethlin' is thill what it'th all about. And, under my toot-a-lege, if you will, I will put the wrethlin' back into the National Wrethlin' Alliance, the new National Wrethlin' Alliance.

HEENAN: Hey, who is thith guy - I mean, this guy? Flair, do you know? I like the way he talks!

FLAIR: Oh, no...

CORNETTE (waking up): It's about time we get somebody in charge of the NWA who has a gist of what the whole business is about! Who is this guy? I'd say it was the Black Scorpion, but that was you, right Flair? Or was it? Or...

FLAIR: Oh, no...

MAEDA (through an interpreter): Finally, an American who understands the true meaning of realistic, yet entertaining wrestling! Perhaps he will let me ply my craft the way I know it should be, with endless on-the-mat wrestling and a karate style that features me shoot-kicking dozens of unwitting Americans like Bob Backlund! Maybe we'll even doublecross some boxers!

FLAIR (in Japanese): Oh, no...

TURNER: What's the matter, Ric, what's the matter?

FLAIR: Ted, the shadowy figure... it's Dusty Rhodes, isn't it!

RHODES (stepping into the light): The one and only!

HEENAN: You mean Rhodes is *still* gonna be booking down there?

RHODES: Who else but the son of a plumber from Authtin, Texas?

HEENAN: *Forget the whole thing.* (picks up McMahon, dusts him off). It wa just a work, Vinnie, a work all the way. Go to get these last two matches on the road right? How 'bout I spit-shine your shoe and buff them with my brand new sport jacket...

FLAIR: Hey, Heenan, you still got Gagne's number?

CORNETTE (puts arm around Flair C'mon, Ric, I got a Smokey Mounta Wrestling championship belt with yo name on it! On second thought, bri yours. I got ours from Toys 'R Us.

FLAIR: I can't believe it...

CORNETTE: Yeah, me neither, cor to think of it! Who'd a thought that Madd would try to put Rhodes over as a babyface in one of his scenarios?

FLAIR: Kayfabe, Jim...

CORNETTE: Spoken like a t Smokey Mountaineer, Nature Boy!

[Mark Madden of Pittsburgh, Pa., been writing monthly columnist for Wrestling Torch Weekly since the April 4, issue. Mark, a 14 year veteran sporswrite the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, graduated w journalism major from Duquesne Univers